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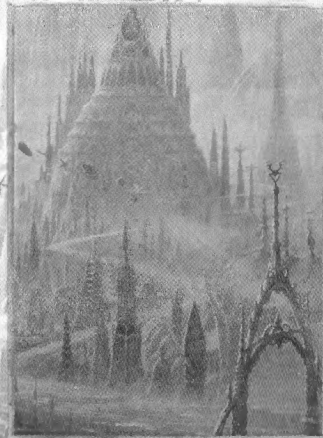
Nicholas Waller



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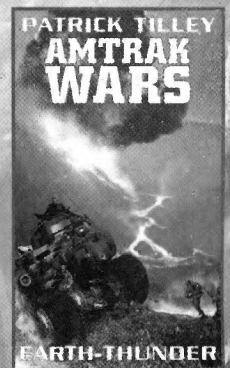
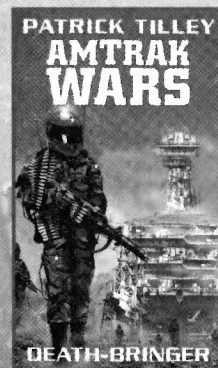
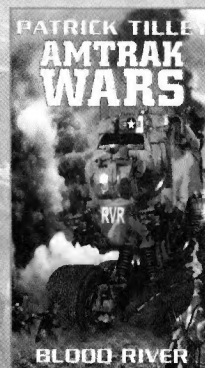
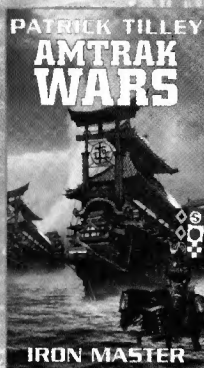
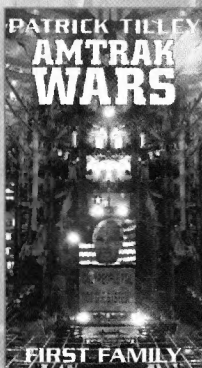
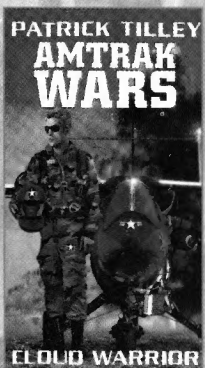
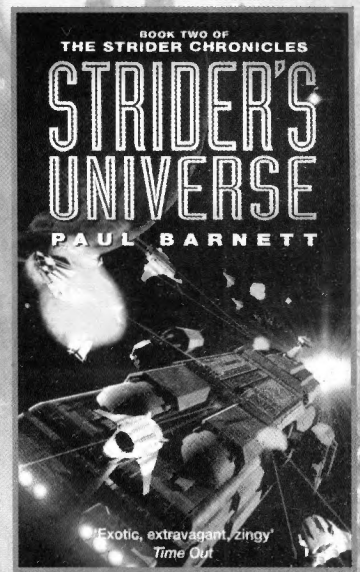
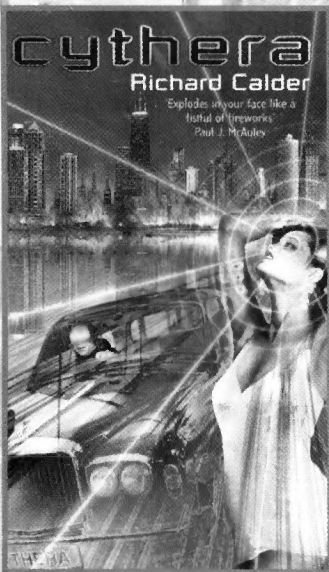
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TAD WILLIAMS



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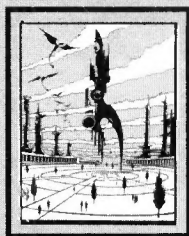
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InterZone

April 1998

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science fiction & fantasy

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Interaction

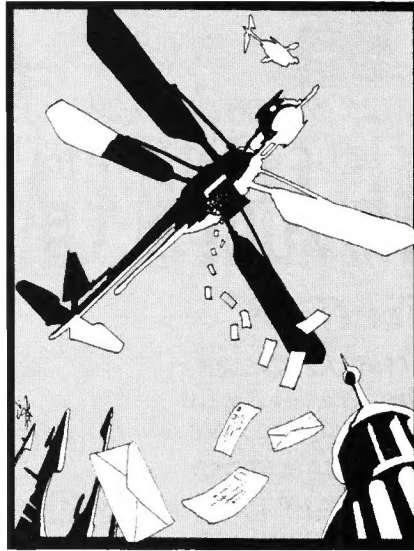
Dear Editors:

I enjoy a good wallow in melancholia as much as anyone, so Gary Westfahl's essay "Why the Stars Are Silent: The Decline and Fall of the SF Monomyth" (*Interzone* 128) was certainly entertaining, but none of his arguments about science fiction, let alone about the future of human civilization, stand up to much scrutiny.

Very few sf writers attempt to predict the future. Most take one of the templates that their contemporaries seem to be getting away with, make a few minor alterations, and then use that as the setting in which to focus on a much narrower subject. No one could pretend that Ursula Le Guin's wonderful parables about the recent past have anything to say about the far future in which they're nominally set. Hard sf writers might make an effort to get the astrophysics right or the xenobiology plausible, but when it comes to changes in humanity itself, they generally take the most conservative position possible, because anything more realistic would introduce too many complications. Readers are certainly willing to put up with this – and personally I think they've been over-tolerant – but it's a long time since most of them have taken "the Science Fiction Monomyth" seriously.

Theories on why we've had no contact with aliens are a dime (or rather, an *Analog* subscription) a dozen, but Westfahl has simply pasted into that blank space an account designed to bolster his paranoia about AI. Maybe with another 100 years of concerted effort we could create *de novo* AIs with something like a human's flexibility, coupled with the speed of electronics or optics; in the same time frame, with comparable effort, we could augment ourselves enough to feel completely unthreatened. In any case, software can be limitlessly useful while remaining non-sentient. My own computer can now juggle, not just arithmetic, but abstract tensor equations far better than Einstein ever could, but it's not one iota closer to possessing self-awareness or independent goals than UNIVAC was. True AI – as opposed to the *faux* AI of chess-playing machines, language translators, and medical expert systems – isn't actually needed to help us do anything, and it's not something we're going to create by accident, after tripping over a banana skin in the lab one night. We're not even going to evolve it, unless we go into genocide mode and slaughter all the failed, retarded mutant programs that arise along the way.

What we will do, eventually, is merge seamlessly with our technol-



ogy: genetic, electronic, whatever comes to be. Westfahl side-steps this obvious conclusion by defining "humanity" to be whoever declines to do this. He might as well declare that only naked hunter-gatherers are truly human. Well, I have a lot of sympathy for hunter-gatherers who'd prefer to be left in peace, and maybe each generation (as much as that word will still mean anything) will reach a point beyond which they do not wish to change. But people's experiences and modes of thought will continue to overlap, and I doubt that even the least-modified *Homo sapiens* whose cousins have circum-navigated the galaxy will have too much trouble understanding the travellers' tales.

As for "conquering" the galaxy ... why bother? Energy efficiency is a far better bet than wrapping stars in Dyson spheres just so you can get by without contraception for a few million years longer. The good news in the lack of visible evidence of extraterrestrial life is that any civilizations out there have probably all come through the eye of the same needle – coping with one planet's limited resources under pressure from population growth – and had the dumb expansionist fantasies knocked out of them. Contrary to Westfahl's hypothesis, I think most humans reached that point some time ago – and rather than being filled with angst, this lets us hand the monomyth over to Grant Naylor, Iain Banks, Paul Verhoeven et al. for the camp/kitsch treatment it deserves, while we build up the courage and stamina to move on to something more honest, and infinitely more exciting.

Greg Egan
Perth, Australia

Dear Editors:

Your new columnist Mr Westfahl's article on the silence of the stars was very interesting. However, I would like to take issue with several points that he makes.

The first area of disagreement is in his example of Von Neumann machines or, rather, the lack of them. Mr Westfahl says that there is no evidence for their presence in this solar system which then leads him to the observation that there is no civilization out there sending these devices out; then he goes on to state, in his contention about machine intelligences, that they *are* out there, but not viewing Earth as civilized yet. If he says that organic intelligences are capable of making errors, then his Machine Intelligences must also have this built into them, for precisely the same reasons.

Another problem I have with Mr Westfahl's assertions about the sort of signals that humanity has sent out is that we do not really *use* space yet: we have sent out less than 20 manned missions to our satellite and, though we have sent a number of probes out to the other planets in the solar system, space exploration could be seen as rather half-hearted at best. The shuttles are really just glorified taxis with nowhere to go for the moment.

Mr Westfahl then states that Earth is not in a particularly privileged position regarding the length of time it has been in existence compared to the Universe (approx. four billion years to about 15 billion). The logic of this looks fairly unassailable, but there are a number of points that make his contention less serious; he seems to be saying that this potential age gap means that we will be far behind the rest (well, that's how it read to me), but the truth is probably that we are somewhere in the middle. However the true gap is *much* smaller than the above figures would imply. The first few generations of stars would be busy producing helium from hydrogen, running large, hot and short. It is assumed that there would not be the elements to produce rocky planets until several generations of stars had passed away. Of course, there isn't really that much difference between a few million and a few billion years from the perspective of a short-lived species such as humanity, but I feel this would mean that species are likely to be more bunched than Mr Westfahl assumed.

In conclusion, I hope that Mr Westfahl is incorrect about there being no one but the Machine Intelligences out there, but I doubt we are going to

see anything like it within my life time. In his article, he says that Vernor Vinge reckons that there will be Machine Intelligences within 30 years. Hardware equivalences will probably be up to it within that time-frame, but I suspect that intelligence will be more dependant on the software and I suspect this will *not* be up to the job!

John Fairhurst

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Dear Editors:

Credit where credit is due: the Christmas issue of *IZ* (number 127) was excellent. The Geoff Ryman story in particular was stunning. When I get time to read for leisure I sometimes like to go for so-called "experimental" writers: Georges Perec, Italo Calvino, Gabriel Josipovici ... and Geoff Ryman. "Family" is not as good as "Dead Space for the Unexpected" (*IZ* 88) but for my money it was still the best story in the issue.

I also like Martin Amis, and was interested to read Peter Crowther's review of Amis's *Night Train*. The critical consensus seems to be that it's not as good as some of his earlier work, and does not represent a significant addition to the genre of detective fiction. These accusations are probably valid. Until a friend lends me his copy of *Night Train* I will not be able to say for sure. All I can say is that given Amis's reputation for literary playfulness I am hardly surprised that he has written a book which seems to be flouting well-established rules. I'm fairly certain he could have written a straightforward detective narrative, but he does not tend to write straightforward anything.

The extent to which Amis attempts to stretch language seems to be important. Both John Updike and Peter Crowther have picked up on Amis's use of the formulation "a police." I agree: it sounds stupid. But I think Amis might have been commenting on the tendency to cease the differentiation between men and women doing similar jobs. For example, the word "actress" is often regarded disdainfully in the acting profession: all are "actors." In Amis's satirical world, all are "polices" – neither male nor female, simply organs of a large judicial body, with only one focus: that of protecting the city using reasonable force.

My friend told me over the phone that in *Night Train* he hates the way Amis uses the word "too" to begin a sentence. "Too" in the sense of "as well." We all know that nobody talks like this. It would seem to me that Amis uses the well-known sf technique of exaggerating the extraordinary in order to make us look around

us at the ordinary. If I'm wrong on these points and the book is simply bad, I'll hold my tongue next time. We all make mistakes.

David Mathew

Dunstable, Bedfordshire

Dear Editors:

Thanks for *IZ* 127. I must say that I felt this issue was one of the best I've seen to date. I love the authors' photographs, and I wish you'd make this a regular policy. Don't get me wrong; I know writers are generally regarded as antisocial types but I do think that this move would give *IZ* a more friendly image. I sometimes feel that we sf fans bring on all the funny looks and bad press ourselves.

On this subject, I'd also like to praise the fiction. *Interzone* has been becoming increasingly negative in recent issues (with a few exceptions) and it's nice to see a some of the more positive, jolly tales soaking through the editorial sponge. I concur with your comments (expressed in an Internet interview with David Mathew) that sf fiction should be full of "knowledge" but, once in a while, it would be nice if we could be seen to sit back and laugh at ourselves. Nice picture of David Pringle on page 4 there, I hope you enjoyed your pint...

David L. Stone

Ramsgate, Kent

Dear Editors:

Despite the underwhelming response to my request for recommendations of French and Italian authors ("Interaction," *IZ* 118) I have managed to discover a few of the former. I thought I'd keep you up to date with my progress so far.

Firstly, Jean-Marc Ligny's *Inner City* (English title for the original French) in which "inners" are the people of Paris and other cities shut off from the violent savagery of the "outers." Inners spend most of their time in a VR paradise ("haute realité" or "high reality"). Unfortunately there is a ghost in the machine which is somehow dragging inners off to a zone from which they can't disconnect. Meanwhile in "basse realité" (the real world) someone is recording images of actual death and destruction and hacking them into "haute realité" to give the complacent inners a jolt. Written with energy, Ligny's novel gives a disturbing glimpse of a possible future, which is perhaps weakened by the implausibility of the central ghost plot which is, however, well-handled.

Bernard Werber's *Les Fourmis* (*The Ants*; available in English as *Empire of the Ants*), written before his *Le Jour des fourmis* (*The Day of the Ants*), is an amazing scientifically-based look at the insect world. The human side of the novel is perhaps a little weak, playing a little too

much on the rather easy enigma of how to make four equilateral triangles out of six matches, whilst the characters' motivation seems too much dictated by the needs of the story rather than blending seamlessly in. As for the ants' story, mighty conflicts against birds, snails and other ants are the backdrop to a quest, by three ants of the Bel-o-kan alliance, to find out who or what has used a mysterious secret weapon against one of Bel-o-kan's foraging parties, and why a group of Bel-o-kan militia is determined that no one finds out. An exciting read which uses the ant world as a measure against the human condition.

I'd also like to mention a collection of short stories, *Le Temps mort* (*Dead Time*), by René Beletto, and an anthology of short stories, *Geneses*, selected and introduced by Ayerdaahl (who also contributes a story). Both collections contain the good and the ordinary, with one brilliant twist-in-the-tail written by the above-mentioned Bernard Werber.

P.S. I have just read through the October 1997-January 1998 issues of *Interzone* and found them as entertaining as ever. However, I am concerned that Geoff Ryman's "Family" in the Christmas issue was more or less designed to be offensive to Christians. And where was "Interaction" for the last two issues?

Malcolm Rowe

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Editor: We haven't always got space for a letter column in every issue, but we try to have one in most issues. Please keep the letters of comment coming. Those with access to e-mail are welcome to send them to interzone@cix.co.uk (but please use this address only for letters, not for story submissions).

Dear Editors:

In *Interzone* 126, Dave Langford's "Ansible Link" announces the award winners for the 1997 Sidewise Award for Alternate History and states that 1997 was the first time they were awarded. Although we like alternate history as much as the next guy, we wanted to point out that the Sidewise Awards were first given out in 1996 when Paul J. McAuley's *Pasquale's Angel* won the long form award, Stephen Baxter's "Brigantia's Angels" (first published in *Interzone*) won the short form award and L. Sprague de Camp won a lifetime achievement award.

A full listing of the 1996 and 1997 winners and honourable mentions can be found at the Sidewise Award website: <http://www.skatecity.com/ah/sidewise/>

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THE TRAVEL AGENT

Nicholas Waller



Bob Kashi stared angrily at the window of the Manhattan travel agency.

Perfectly shot display boards showed pristine white beaches in the Caribbean, the magnificent blocks of the Pyramids, the sinuous ribbon of the Great Wall of China, old mingling with new in the bustling streets of London. In front of these stood models of fat jetliners; beyond were the ranks of terminals, eager customers, helpful staff, shelves of brochures, grinning cutouts of false air hostesses, clocks showing the time in twelve international cities and a worldwide wall map studded with little twinkling red lights.

It was a kind of pornography, and it lied as it beguiled but he wanted it still. A weekend in Paris. Two weeks in Thailand. Latin America. Europe. The whole world, made up and smiling joyously. Oh yes sir, very clean. Please give money first, sir. \$1,598. \$3,998. \$9,998 for first-class service.

Kashi's first brick simply bounced off the glass. Annoyed, he found a heavy chunk of broken paving and heaved it through the window. As the glass cascaded the alarm wailed and he ran round the corner, straight towards two officers in a patrol car.

"Captain Carey, are you telling us that the air force is in fact scared of operating fighter-bombers in this situation?" asked Director Maddens.

Keith Brock, sitting next to him in the darkness, smiled. "Admittedly, it is a dangerous environment," said John Carey. His uniform buttons flashed gold in the projector

light as he put up an explicatory photograph. "But the target – compact, occupying a narrow ridge, a lump at one end, ravines three sides, peaks all round – is hard to hit at jet speeds –"

"Oh, so now the guys aren't good enough?"

"No, but..." Carey studied the spectacular but perhaps overused image: a panorama of the mountains and clouds and semi-sub-tropical vegetation surrounding the stunning man-made terraces of Machu Picchu. "You know, that doesn't really do the place justice; you have to be there."

Maddens shifted in his seat. "That's sorta what we're aiming to prevent, Captain."

"Ahh, yes of course." Carey put up a heavily contoured target map in place of the photo. "So I propose a Special Force assault via Chinooks. Six support Apaches take out the ticket office and hotel, neutralize the rail halt in Agua Calientes, and move to secure the perimeter."

"The troops are then dropped off to set shaped charges at key walls, rocks and features. Covering fire required: minimal. We withdraw in good order, embarking the ground troops while the support choppers deliver a series of timed firebombs and air-to-ground missiles. Our tired but happy forces lift out and away over the – Well. Should be over in eight minutes."

The Captain stood proudly by his screen.

"Any questions?"

Director Maddens sighed. "I'm tempted, but it's unrealistic."

"Sir! The target is evaluated as completely suitable..."



Illustrations by Dominic Harman

"I know. I evaluated it. But I can't authorize this sort of high profile operation. Draw up some plans limited to setting fires lower down the hillside; they must sweep up naturally towards the site. No helicopters." Maddens stood up heavily. "It may well be the most deserving target in Peru, in fact the whole damn hemisphere, but we need more than a plausible deniability of our involvement, we need a plausible impossibility that we could even think of it in the first place. Dr Brock, I want a word."

As the deflated captain packed up his presentation, Brock followed Maddens to his office.

"DEA or ATF, that guy?" asked Maddens as they sat down. Brock thought a moment. "DEA."

"Must have smoked too many fields in Colombia. The USIA trainees aren't much better; they're too Cold War, even now."

"Back to Human Resources then. Looking for?"

"Not gung-ho jocks who could bomb Baghdad tomorrow but have no real idea of our mission. We need people who are instinctively in tune with our goals, that we can train." "Greens?"

"I don't think so. It might compromise their preventive work – Antarctica, the Himalayas; you know."

"Well," said Brock. "Then I have a lead I'd like to try out."

Bob Kashi sat scowling in the bare interview room in the precinct station.

"I don't deny what I did."

Keith Brock leant back. "I know that. But I would like

to know why you did it."

"I need to get out of here. I could lose my job."

"Well, think of this as a possible career move."

"A what?"

"We know your resumé... college, low-paid bookstore jobs. You're conscientious, but you're also frustrated, unfilled, drifting..."

"Thanks."

"It's not what you want."

"What are you? a psychologist?"

"I'm from a government agency."

"What agency?"

"Sorry, covert. It's classified."

"CIA? FBI?"

"DEA would be nearest."

"Drugs? Why pick on me?"

"Not drugs. And think of this as an evaluation, not an interrogation. Why did you break the window?"

"It was stupid, I know. I'm embarrassed about it; but – it costs \$8,000 for a tour in Europe! \$20,000 for a cruise!" "You can't afford it?"

"It's all crap! It's all smiling bimbos and perfect weather... it looks great, but it's a lie. People are fooled into visiting trash dumps they know nothing about to get mugged by starving kids! The photos don't show that, they show an idealized... Well anyway, it made me smash one stupid window! So what?"

Keith Brock smiled. "Though we might express it differently, I think we're on the same wavelength."

Maddens looked up from the seismic maps spread over the boardroom table.

"Umbria, Italy," said Dr Andrea Schlimper. "The last series of tremors."

"And?" said Maddens.

"They caused plenty of damage. Stone-built towns like Assisi are just full of frescoes poised to turn to dust in an instant. They're on a knife-edge, needing just an extra little push—"

"I assume we had nothing to do with the first series of quakes."

"True. But we could do the extra push. Get Montefalco. Perugia. Urbino."

"How?"

"It's a development of oil-seeking technology that sends out shockwaves; the vibrations—"

"Hmmm. Shockwaves can be traced. Keith?"

"She's right; most of the buildings are ready to collapse."

"Are they real?" asked Maddens.

"Generally. There is the normal guidebook hype, misattribution of work to people like Giotto, but I doubt its worth the effort of knocking them down."

"I agree. Most Americans are visiting Italy for family reasons; this sort of operation wouldn't deter many."

"As the towns will undoubtedly collapse by themselves soon," said Brock, "we ought to boost our data capture programme."

"Dr Schlimper?"

"It's a great chance to test our new system—"

"Was there anything else?" asked Maddens.

"My ideas for Venice? or should I just throw them in the trash?"

"The same criteria apply," said Brock. "It's sinking anyway."

"Actually it's the Med that's rising, but we really can't afford to be complacent."

"Maintain our greenhouse gas emissions and we'll be OK, eh?" said Maddens. "Remember, US industry will profit from the large lagoon barrier project; we'd lose more than we gained if we rushed events along."

Dr Schlimper left, obviously irritated.

"If we don't authorize some kind of a mission soon, morale's going to suffer," said Brock.

"I know." Maddens looked at his agenda. "Your new guy next. Hope he's a better bet."

Brock spoke into the phone. "Send in Bob Kashi please." He sat back. "Promising, in the long term. His motivation fits our profile pretty well."

The door opened. Anne Godwin, a USIA trainee in a crisp white short-sleeved shirt, brought Kashi into the room. He smiled nervously at her departing back.

"What do you know about the global tourist and leisure industry?" asked Maddens, without preamble.

"Umm... Not enough, I guess."

"It's an enormous competitive business," said Maddens, leaning back. "Round the world on Concorde, backpacking in Asia, Disneyland. You name it, it means big investments, big profits. US tourist boards at all levels from federal to town district promote our beautiful tourist destinations, co-ordinate friendly facilities and generally help visitors to spend money in the many wonderful American localities."

"I see," said Kashi, guardedly.

"In their turn foreign authorities entice our citizens by pushing their own trinkets: landscapes, ruins, culture. You've seen the posters, the commercials. The lure."

"That's how I got —"

"It may look open, legal, and public — but it's actually a bare-knuckle battle for the traveller's buck."

"Um —"

Maddens looked at Kashi over steepled fingers. "You're probably wondering where we fit in."

"Yes, that's right."

"Policing."

"To protect foreign tourists?"

"Not exactly. Do you have a passport?"

"Er — no."

"How many Americans do?"

"I don't know; half?"

"About ten percent. Mostly, we stay home." Maddens leaned forward and looked straight into Kashi's eyes. "We aim to keep it that way."

"Why?"

"If half our citizens had passports, and half of those went overseas each year, each spending maybe \$2,500 on accommodation, food, transport, gifts... that'd be — Keith?"

"One hundred sixty billion dollars," said Brock.

"My God!"

"Leaving the country," said Maddens. "Every year."

"That much..." said Kashi.

"You know what?" said Maddens. "That sort of money attracts criminals. Cheats. Americans abroad can be naïve. For every zero point one percent of the population that stays here safely watching TV, we can stop at least a billion dollars flowing out to benefit foreign parasites. That's the mission of the TEA."

"TEA?"

"The Tourist Enforcement Agency."

"Charged with the prevention of American tourism abroad," said Brock.

"This isn't a UN thing, is it?"

"Absolutely federal," said Maddens.

"Well, I can see it would be worth it," said Kashi cautiously. "But how would you do it?"

"Travel restrictions," said Maddens. "Effective public information service programmes. Interdicting popular foreign destinations."

"Interdicting? That means attacking doesn't it —"

"Mr Kashi," said Maddens. "Please leave us a moment."

"But —"

"Thank you."

After the door closed, Maddens sat back. "Is he too squeamish to be receptive to the more active side of our work?"

"We'll build on what he already knows: tourist marketing peddles costly fantasies. When he's ready, I'll try the trip down the Nile."

"Risky."

"But a big payoff if it works."

Brock stood at the whiteboard, playing with a marker.

"What's the best way to stop Americans spending money abroad?"

"Cut up their credit cards," said Kashi.

"You're being flippant," said Brock.

"Make it illegal? Stop issuing passports? But you couldn't do that."

"Why not? We are the US Government, after all."

"It's unconstitutional!"

"The middle classes would certainly raise hell if we did it. But suppose," said Brock, looking at the ceiling, "we were at war with Germany, or Cuba?"

"OK, I understand, we'd stop our citizens travelling there."

"And interfere with their right to pursue life, liberty, and the freedom to tour? I'm shocked!"

"Yes, I get your point."

"So you concede that the law could be used to prevent US citizens taking holidays in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon –"

"Well who the hell would want to go there anyway?" asked Kashi.

"Ahh!" said Brock. "You know, you might want to yourself, if it weren't for – Your assignment tonight: what is far more effective than a legal ban on travel?"

Reading reports in his room that evening, Kashi found himself impressed at what the agency had helped accomplish.

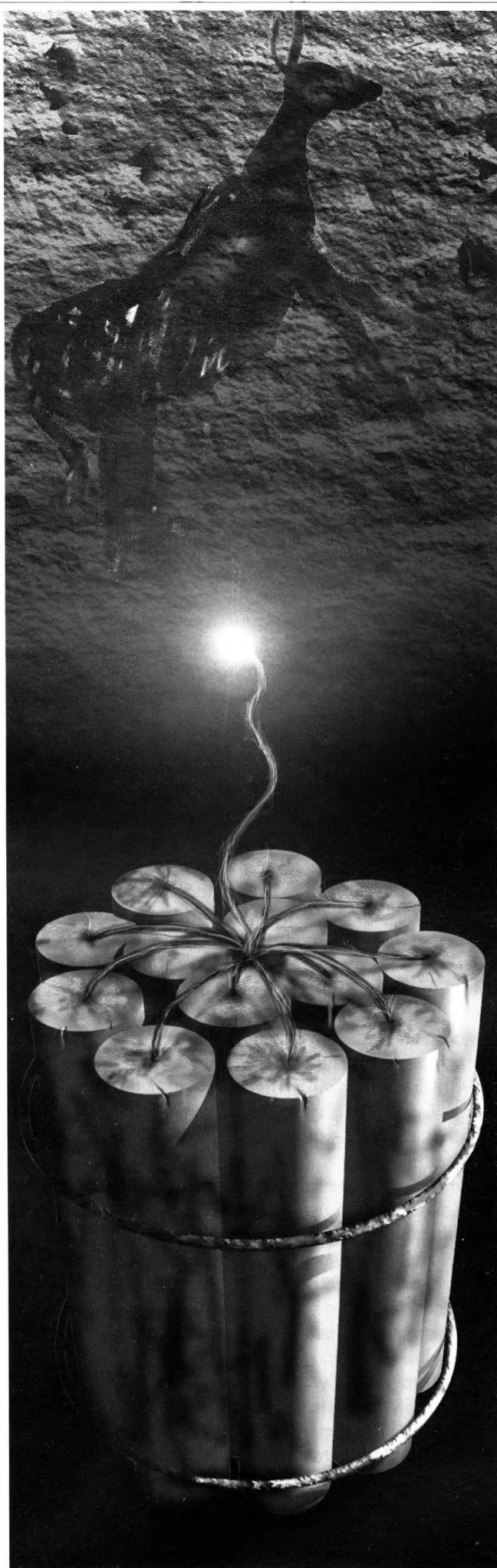
Iraq had Mesopotamia and Ur, the Tigris and the Euphrates, the Garden of Eden. Iran was Ancient Persia – land of Persepolis, Isfahan, the Caspian Sea and the finest caviar... they were ideal tourist destinations, steeped in the romance of generations, Arabian Nights and the crescent moon hanging low over tents in the desert. But you just didn't see them on the posters.

And Lebanon. Small, but packed with history: Phoenicians and Alexander the Great; Byblos, Tyre and Sidon, Romanized Baalbek in the Bekaa Valley, the Cedars, skiing, the vibrancy of pulsating Beirut... sounded wonderful: California, Paris and elegant historic ruins all in one compact package. But when he shut his eyes, the pictures that came to mind were Kalashnikovs and dismal refugee slums, hostage-taking and fundamentalists, civil war and terrorism. Iraq: Saddam Hussein, biological weapons and war. Iran; that was chanting hordes of US-hating veiled women who drank no alcohol and inflicted medieval punishments. Tehran or Miami, sir? You know, this year I'll go to Miami for the tenth time.

If he put his mind to it, how could he characterize the world? Communism was a gift, of course; hostile anti-American dictatorships enforced by humourless secret policemen. Post-communist Russia was ruthless gangsters, inflation and unsafe airlines. China: Tiananmen Square and Tibet. Africa: famine, corruption, AIDS. India: food poisoning, riots, poverty. Asia: pollution, traffic gridlock and financial irregularities. South America: drug cartels, street kids, death squads. It was endless. No one in their right mind would want to go to any of these places.

So what was going on? Did Brock mean that the US actually caused all these atrocious conditions – AIDS in Africa and political instability in the Middle East? Massacres in Rwanda? Famine? War? Pestilence?

By the end of the evening his head was spinning. What was true, propaganda or lie? Was the government of the United States managing the entire world in a vast conspiracy designed simply to prevent American citizens spending their hard-earned dollars abroad?



"Of course not," said Brock when they met again. "It's impossible and unnecessary. We'd never do anything like that. Well, apart from creating the odd small fact on the ground. Take Lebanon; everyone knows we support Israel, but we also fund Hezbollah as long as they stay camped round Baalbek.

"But on the large scale, creating AIDS, Pol Pot, the el Niño effect and all those other natural disasters would backfire horribly, even if it was possible. Our Information Agency make the information available in easy to understand releases; the media do all the necessary demonizing by themselves."

"Europe seems to be tough work," said Kashi.

"Generally, but you can still have a big impact with a little effort. Place a small bomb in Berlin, blame Libya, retaliate – that translates into big drops in US tourism all over Europe. It's the wired society; panics move fast, people stay home."

"Doesn't anyone ever demonize us?"

"We're the Great Satan, an atheist morass of drugs, pornography, racism, lunacy, mugging, mass-murder, gluttony, gambling, perversion, and a military-imperialistic-religious ambition to dominate the world."

"That's crazy!"

"I'm glad you think so."

"I can buy that everybody misrepresents," said Kashi. "I just didn't realize how successful it could be."

"Not everything we've done has worked as well as Islamophobia, which you could call our star project, but even there we've had some relative failures. Did you identify any?"

"Egypt has a lot of tourists. Bali too?"

"Egypt. Very important."

"Don't tell me we pay for the terrorist attacks on US citizens there!" said Kashi.

"It's mainly Germans, Japanese. And it's risky to organize; those guys have an agenda all of their own."

"If they found out, the press would crucify you!"

"Listen; there's a low intensity war going on, and Joe Blow doesn't want to know the dirty work we do on his behalf." Brock looked at Kashi as if coming to a decision. "News management and opinion-forming is one thing," he said. "These days we're moving much more into identifying specific targets for obliteration."

"Obliteration?"

"Yes. Complete physical destruction."

"Isn't that just – vandalism? Especially sites of historic value?"

"We can't deny that under combat conditions collateral damage has been caused to important places – Dresden, every Japanese city except Kyoto. Dubrovnik. Carthage."

"We fought World War Two to cut tourism to Carthage?"

Brock smiled. "You could say there was a fortuitous impact on the tourism gap, but we have no policy of destroying sites of genuine historical value. Well, not yet, anyhow."

Kashi smiled too, wanly. "How do I know that's true?"

"What is the truth? Does the US perpetrate untruths? Not exactly. But lies are being peddled by others; big ones. Our task is to seek them out and destroy them. What do you know about Lascaux?"

"Lascaux? nothing," said Kashi.

"Cave paintings?"

"Oh, umm, you mean prehistoric stuff?"

"Good enough. There's a meeting this afternoon. You'll learn something."

Kashi sat near the back with Dr Brock and looked round the seminar room. This was the biggest group of people he had seen since joining the programme. Over there was Maddens. Next to him sat a couple of lean military officers; behind them some older academic-looking types.

And there was Anne, one of a tight group of five short-haired young men and women in short-sleeved shirts. He felt unprofessional and out of place by comparison.

"Who are they?" he asked Brock in a whisper.

"USIA – Information Agency trainees. And the two men right in the front; they're the field agents."

They had the weatherbeaten complexions of people who spent a lot of time outdoors. Kashi looked at them closely; perhaps this branch would be where his career took him.

"I'm Mark Hojsack, this is Mark Wendell. Hi."

"Hi," said Wendell, while Hojsack put up the first picture: a wooded hillside. "Lascaux cave: two small chambers near Montignac in southwest France. It is, according to the guidebooks, a key example of palaeolithic painting, dating back some 17,000 years."

Kashi studied the simple yet bold paintings of elk, bison and chubby horses with interest.

"The legend is that in 1940 some boys found the prehistoric cave while out looking for their dog. It became a tourist sensation after the war and had to be sealed off in 1963 because the flood of visitors caused irreparable damage to the paintings. In the 80s, a perfect replica – called Lascaux II, built in an old quarry nearby – was opened. The pictures were recreated exactly. It gets up to 2,000 visitors a day."

"It's a classic pattern," said Wendell. "We're asked to believe that an ancient artefact that lasted perfectly preserved for 17 millennia took less than a quarter century to start crumbling away once it was discovered."

Kashi noticed that others in the room were smiling knowingly.

"You're way ahead of us. Yes; Lascaux II is modern; but so is the original so-called prehistoric cave—"

"You mean it's a fake?" said Kashi incredulously, out loud. One of the USIA women – Anne, unfortunately – sniggered. Kashi felt his face reddening.

"Precisely," said Wendell. "Lascaux was first secretly constructed in the late 1930s. The materials used proved to be substandard, so they had to rebuild it; but every last bit is 20th-century work."

"That's a fine job," said Maddens. "You've exposed a great fraud on the American people. Now, what do we do about it?"

"I've had some preliminary thoughts for renormalizing the situation," said Captain Carey.

"I'm sure you have," said Maddens. "No doubt ones that would invite disproportionate retaliation; the French are proud bastards. Do any of you youngsters have a more reasonable suggestion?"

The USIA group staying silent, Kashi suddenly felt it was time he took his chance.

"An accident," he said. "The replica is in a quarry. Some old dynamite could – go off? destroy Lascaux II and flood the original?"

Maddens looked pleased. "Not bad... not bad at all."

Kashi made a determined effort not to glance over to see if Anne was looking his way.

"Well done," whispered Brock.

"We'll consider specifics when we have fully evaluated the environment," said Maddens. "But next on the agenda, Dr Andrea Schlimper will present a technique for the seismic disintegration of Machu Picchu."

"Machu Picchu is a fake?" said Kashi incredulously.

"I'm afraid so," said Brock afterwards, over a coffee.

"Lascaux, OK – it's smaller than a house. But Machu Picchu is huge! Isn't it the most popular attraction in South America?"

"What else do you know about it?"

"It's the lost city of the Incas..."

"Hiram Bingham, exploring Peru looking for the lost city, finds this unknown site," said Brock. "Untrue; Bingham was a fraudster on a massive scale. He built Machu Picchu, then discovered it himself."

"Why don't we expose it as a fraud?"

"Who would believe us? No doubt it has powerful friends."

"So instead we'll vibrate it to pieces?"

"It wasn't a priority while we had the Shining Path. But now a generated earthquake would be ideal."

"Don't you feel like just nuking it or something?"

"Sure. But you know the answer to that."

"Yeah. I guess international condemnation followed by some sort of retaliation." Kashi sat up. "But has that really happened anywhere?"

"Remember the bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York?"

"Of course; my home town."

"That was a warning shot from the British."

"The British...? No."

"It was convenient for us both to blame Pakistani fundamentalists. But we know and they know we know."

"Wow... Why, have we ever interdicted English places?"

"During the SDI tests we used a satellite beam weapon on York Minster to start a fire." Brock smiled. "Some people thought it was a bolt from God. Anne Hathaway's cottage. Windsor Castle. Usually we're a lot more subtle with them. For instance, we have a controlling interest in Stonehenge –"

"Is that a fake too?"

"No, it's just an unpleasant experience. Price-gouging, busy roads, a urine-soaked pedestrian tunnel, hard to see anything. But we have a nice little bookstore there too."

"Don't tell me – I used to work in bookstores. You get better views in an expensive book?"

"Excellent! So you'll appreciate why our government helps our corporations develop and maximize income streams through the exploitation of copyright on information about places like Stonehenge. Not just book publishing – there are big media corporations in all kinds of knowledge rights fields from words to 3D navigable VR models... Why struggle to see some old rocks in the rain when you can download a digital version at home for a small fee?"

"So film, TV, cable, music..."

"And video, software, satellite communications, virtual reality; don't forget theme parks. They're distributed, mobile, and hard to hit. Investing in the

internet and intellectual property protection is our strategy. Most foreigners invest in old buildings and artefacts of dubious provenance."

"But the copyright in real archaeological sites can't be held by US corporations – can it?"

"Why not? The Japanese owned the reproduction rights to the renovated Sistine Chapel. Who adds the value? It's usually US taxes that fund archaeological research; our scholars who write about them; our photographers take pictures, our graphic designers build 3-D models, our businesses take the risks. They should be compensated."

"What about the country that owns the site?"

Brock waved his hand impatiently. "An accident of history. Why should undeveloped countries benefit simply because a thousand-year-old building happens to stand inside their hundred-year-old borders? There are precedents in oil and pharmaceuticals. If we can patent the blood of primitive tribesmen half way round the world we can certainly copyright cut-away pictures of the Taj Mahal."

"You know, right now I find it a relief that some things are real enough to be exploited." Kashi looked into his empty cup. "I want to be useful to the agency, to you, but I've never been to any of these countries – how can I tell what's fake or not? To me it's all just words and pictures and historical disputes."

"It's time you got out into the world," said Brock decisively. "There's something going on in Egypt and I need to take a look."

Kashi stood at the window of his air-conditioned 14th floor room in the Ramses Hilton, looking out over the slow Nile as the sun set fatly in the polluted sky. He felt excited, alive, his new US passport in his new back pocket and new memories frothing in his brain.

Cairo was not what he had expected, it was better. Sprawling, crowded, rushing, bright, alien and dirty and packed with houses, wailing mosques, back alleys, faceless apartments, official buildings, neon lights in Arabic, sad palm trees, and thousands of frantic little dinged dodgem cars on double-decker streets. The people were short and skinny, seething with a desperate energy on the verge of madness. Bones of countless levels of past old cities seemed to lie just beneath the uneven surface, constantly ground to dust by the daily passage of millions of modern feet. The place oozed time from its pores and drains and roofs, everything worn with age and discoloured through use. It was faintly dangerous but fiercely alive.

He craved the buzz of the street. Far below traffic jammed the bridges and roads. Large international hotels loomed by the sluggish Nile, sparkling in the gathering dusk, moored ships of refuge for company representatives and other weary travellers. Above, catching the late sun, an airliner, lights blinking purposefully, headed out across the dome of the world to who knows where – London, Bombay, maybe even New York.

And there, west on the purpling horizon, he could make out the hazy shape of the pyramids at Giza, standing guard at the edge of the desert. He had got there that morning, finally, and saw the man-made mountains close up, touched the massive blocks that had been there 4,000 years, and wondered at the enig-

matic Sphinx that had kept them company for so long.

In the afternoon he had gone with Brock to the Information Agency office, where they introduced his friend Anne to her first posting among the crisply short-haired, short-sleeved staff. Keith stayed for discussions with managers while Kashi, revelling in his deliberately underdressed, young-tourist field-agent style, had been sent alone to the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square.

There he saw for himself the artefacts of the ages: Tutankhamen's gold face and treasures, walls of hieroglyphics, stacks of sarcophagi, rows of mummified and desiccated bodies, the whole apparatus of boats to sail those silver-sanded seas beyond death. For the first time in his life he felt the weight of the countless generations of men and women who must have gone before him on this earth.

He checked his watch. Oops, late to meet Keith Brock in the bar at the Nile Hilton.

Kashi looked at his beer glass with satisfaction. "This may be disloyal, Keith, but I don't want to be prevented from travelling."

Brock laughed. "Had a good day?"

"Unbelievable. Fantastic."

"Don't worry. Like drugs and prostitution, tourism will always be with us. And the more Americans stay at home, the better for you, eh? You don't have to share the sights with a load of fat old couples from Iowa."

"Put like that –"

"Protecting them from fraud. Helping the Greens save the environment. And we get to travel. It sounds selfish, but everyone wins, apart from a few criminals." "I'll drink to that."

Brock raised his glass.

"So, did you discover anything suspicious?" he asked.

"Fakes? no," said Kashi. "The pyramids seem just too solid; almost like they're natural..."

"Anything else out there?"

"Well, the Sphinx is having pretty obvious restoration work – is that what you mean?"

"It's a slippery slope and a matter of some discussion... where does simple maintenance shade into renovation and restoration, on through building re-imagined structures from a few holes in the ground, and finally to manufacturing complete frauds? But that's a big subject. Anything else? What about the museum?"

"King Tut? – His stuff looked great... but I really can't tell old from new, antique from modern. To me, it's all genuine. Completely. Sorry; did I fail some test?"

"No, don't worry, said Brock. "We let you go alone today for a purpose: so you could see just how hard it is to judge. From now on you'll have us to guide you. And this –"

Brock passed over a small grey device.

"What is it?" said Kashi, flipping it open.

"The United States Information Agency Palmtop," said Brock, proudly. "Great for field agents – all the history, tourist data, visa information and foreign language phrases you could possibly need – without the self-interested hype of the commercial tourist literature. Keep it with you at all times. Download new data only at USIA offices. It will be your constant and true companion."

"It can tell me what's old and what's actually mod-

ern?" said Kashi, awed.

"It is a database of what we know so far; and in time, what you too find out and report."

"Oh, wow."

"To answer your specific question, apparent age is not a guarantee that a thing is genuine. Even fakes can be old: duplicitous English monks in the 11th century successfully faked King Arthur's grave at Glastonbury in order to attract gullible paying pilgrims. Medieval European churches had enough relics of the True Cross to build a ship or two. But take a moment to think from your own experience: what is common to the Lascaux cave and Machu Picchu?"

"OK. Nothing much at first sight – one's a French prehistoric cave, the other's a hill town in Peru. Without checking, I would say they were both discovered this century but had never been heard of before?"

"Yes. Recent discovery is certainly a good indicator. That's why we remain wary of places like Pompeii, Troy, Sutton Hoo."

"King Tut was found in this century, so is he a fraud? Should I look him up?"

"We don't know; it's still worth probing. That palm-top doesn't know it all. And watch out for new things. When Iraq opens up we expect to see a lot more of Babylon than ever before, perhaps even the fabled Hanging Gardens, which probably never existed in the first place. And we're extremely suspicious that Atlantis is going to show up again one day."

"Atlantis? Isn't it fictional?"

"Possibly not; the Greeks in Santorini made a claim for it. Some say it is in the sea off Cornwall, others that it's on the altiplano in Bolivia; just ripe for a latter-day Hiram Bingham. And the seven wonders of the ancient world, such as the Colossus of Rhodes and the Pharos of Alexandria... I bet you within 50 years someone will claim to have discovered them."

"What about things that were always known and never lost? Like the Colosseum in Rome, the Parthenon, the Leaning Tower of Pisa?"

"Some may turn out to be recent improvements to an earlier structure. The ancient Colosseum was said to hold over 150,000 spectators. We might find – without much help from the Italians – that the original seated 5,000 at most... what we see today is impressive, but not strictly original. And the Parthenon in Athens – probably first built of cedar wood, rebuilt in stone in the 18th century."

"And the pyramids?" asked Kashi, worried.

"No more than 50-feet high piles of mudbricks. What you visited today are typically grandiose Victorian re-creations to see how far the engineering could be pushed."

"You're kidding!"

"Yes!" Brock laughed. "Sorry, couldn't resist it. They seem to be the genuine article."

"Well, that's a relief."

"Remember. The price of truth is eternal vigilance. Cleopatra's Needles were exposed as recent objects only when we found they were crumbling so fast they'd have been heaps of dust by Christ's birth if they'd been genuine. There's plenty more of Egypt for us to check."

"How can you possibly keep track of new artefacts appearing all over the world?"

"Plato chips."

"What?"

"It's a form recognition technology, installed in networked photo-processing labs around the country. Tourist snaps are automatically and covertly scanned; the software prioritizes targets and alerts us to novel items."

"You guys think of everything."

Brock smiled. "Now drink up. We leave in the morning."

The vast sheet of water spread to the south, shimmering in the bright desert. Kashi, standing near the great statues of Abu Simbel, checked the entry in his USIA palmtop. It was dull and pedantically accurate: ancient Lake Nasser, created between 3,200 and 3,300 years ago when the Pharaohs built the dam at Aswan to regulate the annual flooding of the Nile: the world's first significant water-engineering project.

The journey hundreds of miles south along the winding river and into the increasing heat had been a tremendous adventure for Bob Kashi, almost spiritual in its impact. Luxor, Karnak, the Valley of the Kings, Kom Ombo. In some nameless place on the voyage downriver – far from any monuments – he had stood at a spot timeless and profound and intensely fragile, like the Earth herself orbiting her naked sun. The habitable country was so narrow, just a few hundred yards across: brilliant blue water with white-sailed feluccas drifting downstream, bordered on each bank by palm trees and irrigated crops in mud brown fields, supervised by a dusty hamlet; beyond that lay only the pitiless empty desert. Life here for 150 centuries or more had been fixed to the immutable wheel of the seasons.

He felt as though he was tracking the history of the human race along the umbilical of life; if he left Keith Brock here to his paranoid fantasies and pressed further south he would reach equatorial East Africa and the cradle of humanity itself a million years in the past. New York and supermarkets and television and the internet and a thousand trivial aspects of modern life seemed so far away, so ephemeral, so disconnected from the reality of the world, which was about how to conjure sustenance from the soil and the water and the burning light.

And yet people found time to create the most magnificent expressions of hope and immortality. Kashi turned to look up at the four huge ancient statues of Abu Simbel, two each side of a dark entrance to a cool temple carved out of the living rock. Enigmatic but proud, staring out over the lake as they had for thousands of years, the enormous figures were at one with their cliffside. They gave him a tremendous sense of peace and permanence.

"There's something not quite right," said Keith Brock, coming up to him, worried.

"Keith," said Kashi, sadly. "What is it now?"

"The shape of the hill, this cliff; doesn't quite match the rest of the landscape. And there's a strange little door. See, to the right there."

"Can't you just let it be? Feel the moment? It's probably nothing."

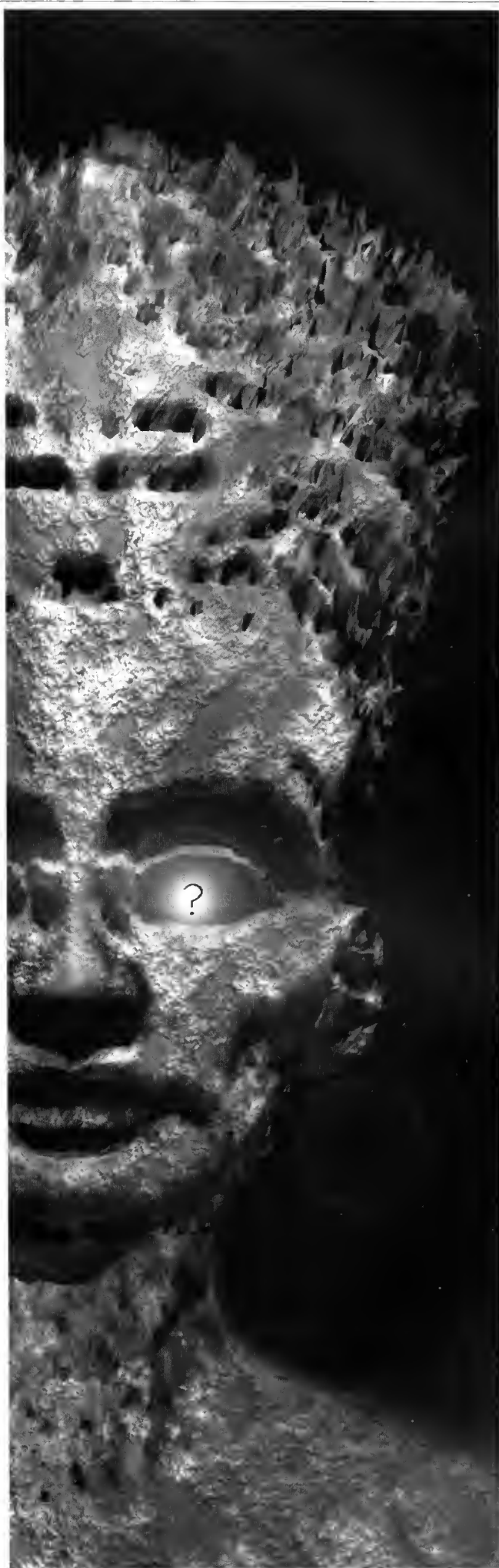
"Kashi," said Brock, forcefully. "We're here on a mission. Now, while I distract attention, you investigate."

"But –"

"Do it."

"OK! OK!"

As Kashi reached the unexceptionable door, 200 yards



behind him Brock fell to the ground with a convincing cry, bringing officials and tourists walking, then running.

The door posed no problem to Kashi's new skills. With a quick twist and a shoulder push he forced his way into a dark space where he could no longer see. He shut the door against the blinding desert and let his eyes adjust.

As they did he had the shock of his life: he was standing in a hangar-sized building, a large artificial space defined in concrete.

In the high ceiling a few small fluorescent lights burned.

Two pairs of massive concrete buttresses obviously supported the weighty stone figures outside.

A big rectangular structure between them was clearly the outer shell of the so-called temple area reached by the central doorway.

Steel ladders and platforms must provide access to high places for maintenance engineers.

Boxes on the walls presumably housed light switches, climate control, fire systems, a telephone.

The statues and the temple and the entire hill comprised one big audacious fake, no more than 40 years old and brutally arrogant in its execution.

He did not know how but he was outside in the hammering noon with his hands gripping Brock's shirt until they pulled him off and quietened him down and brought him back to the bus and to Aswan, back to Cairo, back to the modern world, and he watched as he travelled as the people sailed their little boats and picked dates and washed their clothes in the river and lived in poverty among the ruins in a complex street theatre that did not fool him for one second.

A week of mixed fortunes. An earthquake in Peru had caused damage to Sacsayhuaman. Archaeologists at Hali-carnassus said they had found the ancient Mausoleum. During an attack by helicopter-borne drug agents in Cambodia, Angkor Wat had regrettably been collateralized.

Investigative Head (Asia Division) Bob Kashi, wearing check trousers and a Hawaiian shirt, a camera resting on his expanding stomach, smiled as he folded his

magazine and walked stiffly across the Beijing Hyatt parking lot with his wife, Anne, plump in her tight shirt and red-faced. It had been an interesting day out at the Great Wall – thousands of Chinese tourists and quite a few Americans swarming and gawping at the marvellous section of ancient defences.

Bob and Anne knew that most of the 2,000 miles of wall was a barely recognizable heap of stones that could have been shovelled together in an afternoon by children. Final proof, enough for Director Carey to protect himself, was hard to come by amongst the inscrutable Chinese, but they were working on it.

Entering the lobby, Bob glanced at the Deng State Travel Services bureau and noticed that the poster of New York – Statue of Liberty, Empire State and all – had peeled off the wall in their window display.

"Hi!" he said breezily to the crew-cut Chinese travel agent at the desk, trim in his white short-sleeved shirt. "Your great picture of my home town has fallen down!"

"I'm sorry sir?"

"New York! Fall down!"

"Oh sorry sir! I'll see to it at once."

"I bet you send a lot of tourists to New York."

"No sir! The Chinese people prefer to experience the rich joys of their own cultural heritage."

"Say it ain't so! Why?"

"They don't care to be murdered, sir."

Bob rested against the counter, forcing a smile. "Son, they shouldn't believe all they read about the USA."

The agent leaned forward, his eyes hard and glittering. "Oh, but we think they should. Sir."

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Nicholas Waller was born in Beirut in 1958. After 20 years in Britain, he returned to the Middle East on a couple of business trips in the mid-1990s, working as a sales manager for a US college textbook publisher. He now lives in Luton, and the above is his first published story.

fiction

Ian R MacLeod

Stephen Baxter

Molly Brown

David Langford

Ian McDonald

Keith Brooke

insight

<http://www.users.zetnet.co.uk/iplus>

infinity plus

Nicholas Royle

Eric Brown

critique

Jonathan Wylie

The Piebald Plumber of Haemlin

Brian Stableford

Haemlin, the Ultimate Utopian City, had a problem. Such a thing should not have been possible, but the Brain of Haemlin knew better than to waste time in useless lamentations. The problem was the worst kind imaginable, because it affected the Bloodstream itself – and anything that affected the Bloodstream went to the very Heart of the Body of Humanity and all that it stood for. The problem had to be solved, and quickly, but the Brain knew that it would not be solved easily. Everything that *human* ingenuity could do had already been done in the planning and making of Haemlin, when that ingenuity had attained its peak and its terminus.

The Senior Citizens of Haemlin were bitterly disappointed to find themselves in such a predicament, for which they held the Brain to blame. “How can this be?” they demanded. “Where did this menace come from? Why have all the measures you have taken to counter the threat been so utterly ineffective?”

“I don’t know,” replied the Brain. “There is no imaginable way that our fortress could have been invaded, but invaded it has been. There is no imaginable explanation for the invaders’ immunity to all the measures I have deployed against them, but immune they are.”

“Is there *nothing* further that can be done?” demanded the anguished Senior Citizens.

“One thing and one thing only,” said the Brain. “We must submit the problem to the consideration of a fresh intelligence. The time may well have come for the Inheritors of Earth to repay their debt to humankind, if they can do it. Our ancestors nurtured theirs through difficult infancy and troubled childhood; I doubt that they will refuse to offer assistance in maintaining us through the eternal twilight of our years.”

“Have all our hopes and dreams come to this?” complained the Senior Citizens. “Are we no longer the masters of our own destiny? Have we no pride? *Are we not men?*”

To which the Brain answered, with crushing literalness: “yes”; “no”; “yes, alas”; and, “it all depends what you mean by *men*.”

Having settled those issues, the Brain sent for help to the pigs who had inherited the Earth.

When the pigs of Earth were informed of the broad nature of Haemlin’s problem – the details remained annoyingly vague – they decided to send a plumber and his tools. They also sent an apologetic note to the effect that because they had never expected to receive a summons to the far side of the moon they had no spacecraft capable of accommodating a larger relief force.

The plumber was a piebald pig named Tam.

The ancestors of the citizens of Haemlin had, of course, remade their inheritors in something very like their own image, but subsequent generations of pigs had chosen to engineer some of their traditional features into their appearance. Most modern pigs wore relatively modest surskins covered in short, bristly hair which were simply patterned in various combinations of pink, white and black. Although they all had maintained the old human habit of using chairs the majority had reclaimed their curly tails. Even the faces of more recent generations had begun to take on a slightly porcine expression; piggish pride had never managed to come to terms with the aesthetics of noses.

It was, of course, inevitable that the Senior Citizens of Haemlin should deplore all of these trends.

“Our ancestors gave you everything,” they complained to Tam, when they had admitted him to the interior of the moon by the farside entry-port. “They could have chosen dogs, or lions, or horses, but they chose *you*. Did they raise you up from the ranks of the beasts merely in order that you should lower yourselves down again? Your present appearance, if typical of your kind, is a flagrant insult to your makers.”

“Your ancestors gave us the Earth, which is a good deal less than *everything* by anyone’s reckoning,” Tam replied, quite undaunted by the fact that he was the first pig to find himself in human company for at least 5,000 years. “Dogs had not enough biomass to be successfully uplifted, horses too much. Lions had been hounded to extinction, along with every other viable

candidate for biosophistication. Far from lowering ourselves, we have continued to travel the path of progress which your ancestors forsook and whose abandonment has delivered you into your present predicament. Whatever you may think of my appearance – which is by no means atypical of my kind, although we have preserved a reasonable variety of forms – it has a great deal more in common with the appearance of your ancestors than you now have.”

The Senior Citizens could no more argue with Tam’s ripostes than with those of the Brain of Haemlin. Everything he said was true, especially the observation about their own appearances. In order to meet him face to face the Senior Citizens had emerged as far from the flesh of their living city as they ever did – displaying not merely faces, but arms, torsos and even a subtle hint of leg – but they were irreversibly bound into the Body of Humanity. The Bloodstream provided their every need – nourishment, emotion and transcendent experience – and they could not isolate themselves from its bounty. The kind of self-containment which their ancestors had suffered for more than a million years would have been intolerable to them, hellish in its isolation. When the human race had come to the Great Existential Crossroads, faced with the choice of sticking with the hard road or embracing universal happiness, people had unanimously decided To Be There For One Another. Humans had wished for the moon, and they had got their wish; they had hollowed it out so that all that remained of its barren rock became a thick protective shell enclosing the living flesh of the Body of Humanity. Thus had begun the era of Man-in-the-Moon, of Haemlin, the City of the Blood – the era which had been perfect, unalloyed bliss... until now.

“Now,” said Tam, when he was sure that no more accusations would be forthcoming, “what, exactly, is the problem?”

“Rats,” said the Senior Citizens, peevishly.

“Pardon?” said Tam.

“We have rats in our walls and in our veins, in our cavities and in our guts, in our fibres and on our nerves – rats whose vile secretions are polluting the Bloodstream itself. Rats are our problem, Master Pig: rats, rats, *rats*.”

“We were rather under the impression,” Tam observed, with mild astonishment, “that your ancestors had driven rats to extinction, along with cockroaches, wasps, flies and every other little thing that annoyed them.”

“So were we,” said the Senior Citizens. “The Brain has no idea where these rats have come from, and nor have we. All we know is that our supposedly infallible defences have failed. If you can figure out what went wrong, you might care to let the Brain know – but the real point at issue is whether you can *do* something about it. Is there the remotest chance, do you think, that you can?”

“I’m a plumber,” said Tam, rather haughtily. “There are no depths, even on the moon, that I cannot plumb. There is no leak that I cannot plug, no blockage I cannot clear. To be perfectly honest, I’m delighted that you called me in. No plumber on Earth has had such a challenge to deal with in 30,000 years – quite probably more, given that your ancestors weren’t such assiduous record-keepers as we pigs. I shall be the first of my kind to venture into these as-yet-unplumbed depths, and I

am glad to have the opportunity.”

“How will you do it?” the Senior Citizens wanted to know.

“That would be telling,” Tam replied. “First, there’s the small matter of my fee. The call-out charge will be pretty steep, I fear – it’s a long way from home to the far side of the moon.”

“We weren’t actually thinking of paying you a *fee*,” said the Senior Citizens of Haemlin. “We rather thought you might do it as a favour, in return for everything that our ancestors gave yours: intelligence, the Earth, etcetera.”

“That’s not the way I work,” said Tam. “Anyway – what have you done for us *lately*?”

The Senior Citizens had no alternative but to refer his request back to the Brain, whose response was typically succinct. “Anything we have that he wants,” it said, “is on offer, just so long as *we* get what *we* want: Heaven without the rats. Tell him that if he can get rid of the rats, he can name his own price.”

“I will,” said Tam, “just as soon as I’ve figured out the parts and labour. But I can tell you now – it’s going to cost you.”

Behind all this bravado, Tam was actually rather anxious about his prospects of success. Even the largest city on Earth was tiny compared with Haemlin, and the cities of Earth were aggregations of hundreds of thousands of individual sties.

In principle, of course, a sty was a sty however big it was – a mere artificial creature of flesh and blood – but he couldn’t be entirely sure that the principle in question could be stretched far enough to embrace an edifice like Haemlin. The sties of Earth were subject to all manner of parasitic infestations, and the relentless march of natural selection was constantly producing new ones that were resistant to traditional plumbing techniques, but they were mostly microbes – worms and bugs at worst. No sty presently occupied by pigs was big enough to provide hiding places for anything the size of a rat.

The real difference between the cities of Earth and Haemlin, however, was not their size but the manner in which they were inhabited.

A pig family’s sty provided fresh water, manna and heat. It recycled all their wastes. There were any number of ways a pig could plug into his walls via leads and leeches, for excitement or entertainment, but at the end of the day a pig and his family’s sty were just partners in life. Every family could move house. Every pig could die. Every pig, no matter how intrusive his family might be, and however fondly his sty might cosset him, could isolate himself simply by walking away.

In Haemlin, things were different.

Humans were permanently plugged in, to their walls and to one another. Humans and their homes had become inseparable, components of the same vast organism. Humans had forsaken mere movement – and mere mortality – in favour of the eternal Quest of Mind. The human race was one vast and irredeemably happy family, forever insulated from the horrors of isolation. Their plumbing was not merely more extensive than the plumbing Tam was used to; it was different in kind. According to the humans, it was better in every possible

way: better designed; better built; better organized; better tended.

Whence, then, came the rats in Haemlin's walls? How was their presence conceivable – and how was it conceivable that the Brain could do nothing about them? Humans were not pigs, after all; they no longer had to trot along to the doctor every time they picked up a virus or a parasite. Human minds, unlike the minds of pigs, were supposed to have immediate knowledge of the most intimate corners of their own bodily being – and even if the individual brains of the citizens still harboured lacunae of ignorance, the Brain of Haemlin was supposed to know everything that needed to be known.

Fortunately, Tam was not a pig to waste much time on theoretical considerations. He unshipped his tools, selected out his keenest hookworms, checked with the Senior Citizens to make sure that they would not be harmed by Haemlin's natural defences, and sent them off to capture a few rats.

More than 50 per cent of the hookworms failed to return. The rats of Haemlin were tougher and nastier than anything Tam's tools had ever encountered on Earth. A few of the ones that did return, however, achieved what they had been sent to do: they brought a dozen rats out of the Body of Humanity, six dead and six alive.

Tam took the rats to the workroom on board his spaceship, and set about subjecting the corpses to rigorous examination and biochemical analysis.

He quickly confirmed that the invaders of Haemlin's flesh did indeed seem to be rats. As far as outward appearances were concerned they bore a closer resemblance to their ancestral stock than Tam bore to his. Their sleek black fur was more reminiscent of an otter's, and their "breathing apparatus" was adapted to draw oxygen directly from Haemlin's rich red Bloodstream, but their teeth were ratty teeth, shaped for gnawing, and their brains were ratty brains, with so little capacity that they almost certainly had nothing much on their ratty minds but the employment of their ratty teeth. Things were much more complicated at the level of the genome, but when Tam compared the chromosome-maps of his specimens with the pre-uplift records it did appear that these rats were merely more complicated versions of their ancient counterparts.

Rats were supposed to have been extinct for thousands of years. Even if a few had survived on Earth, evolving greater genetic complexity all the while, there was surely no way they could have crossed the quarter million miles of vacuum that separated Earth from the moon, or gnawed their way through the walls of Haemlin's impregnable citadel.

Tam designed a range of artificial viruses, every one of which was supposed to be cleverly adapted to attack the rats while leaving the human flesh of their hosts untouched, but the viruses made no headway against the cells in the tissue cultures, let alone the live specimens. The new genes which had been added into the basic rat chromosome-complement had somehow included defences against that whole line of attack.

Cyanide worked well enough, and it proved that the rats were indeed mortal, but Tam could hardly flood the Body of Humanity with cyanide just to get rid of the

rats. Even if the operation were successful and the Body of Humanity survived, the level of damage sustained would be intolerable. If he were to use poison against the polluters of humanity's Bloodstream it would have to be a more selective one.

He tried to find one.

He failed.

The next plan on his list was to use hookworms to hunt the rats down, but when he sent out a second set of tools to gather more specimens the failure rate shot up from 50 per cent to a hundred. The rats had already adapted; if that strategy were to work he would need to produce new tools of an unprecedented efficiency – and if even a few rats were to escape his custom-designed predators the campaign would have to be escalated even further.

Tam sent all this information back to Earth, bouncing the signal off an ancient communication satellite which had been installed long before the last humans had retreated to the interior of the moon. While he had been working on site, the Plumbers' Union had commissioned its best brains to look at the problem from a purely hypothetical perspective. His fellows sent back several more suggestions, and promised to reconsider his own data with all due care.

By the time a few more signals had been sent back and forth Tam and his colleagues had reached two tentative conclusions, one concerned with the probable origin of the rats – which he now preferred to call neo-rats – and the other with the best way to get rid of them. They both seemed unlikely – so unlikely that the Brain of Haemlin would doubtless have considered them unthinkable – but if there had been a solution that the Brain *had* considered thinkable, it would presumably have been thought of already.

Tam went back to the Senior Citizens, to tell them what he intended to do – but he diplomatically refrained from mentioning his current hypothesis as to the origin and true nature of the neo-rats.

"It'll never work," the Senior Citizens said.

"Let's try it anyway," said Tam. "If it doesn't, there's no harm done. *You* can simply disregard the signal – and if you can't it won't matter, because you won't be able to respond to it."

The reasoning behind Tam's plan of action was this. Unlike humans and uplifted pigs, the neo-rats were creatures of instinct. Having no conscious intelligence they could not make rational calculations. Their brains were programmed to respond to certain signals in certain ways, and all that had to be done was to deliver the appropriate signal to the appropriate area of the brain. In principle, any perceptive pathway might carry the signal – even sight or sound – but the one best adapted for the role was the modified olfactory sense of taste which the neo-rats used to navigate their way around the nourishing Bloodstream and to signal to one another that they were ready to mate. All Tam had to do, in effect, was to design two versions of the ultimate neo-rat pheromone, each alloyed with the ultimate neo-rat food-lure. These he could lay down as a trail, extending from the antechamber where he had spoken to the Senior Citizens to the airlock which had admitted his spaceship to the moon's interior. Once the neo-

rats were all in the airlock, it could simply be opened, exposing the entire population to the merciless void.

"It only requires a pair of rats to be left behind," the Senior Citizens pointed out. "What if there are a few lame ones which can't respond quickly enough to the signal?"

"Let's try it and see," said Tam. He was, of course, refraining from pointing out the real problem, which was that because the neo-rats appeared to have sprung from nowhere before, they might well be able to do so again even if there were no lame ones stranded within the Body of Humanity.

"Okay," said the Senior Citizens. "Go ahead."

So Tam tried it – and he watched it work from the safety of his spaceship. He watched the neo-rats flock past the vessel in their thousands: a sleek and horrible black tide. He waited for a long time before he signalled to the Brain that the airlock should be closed, but not so long that any confused neo-rats had begun to make their drunken way back from the orgy of sensation that he had contrived. He didn't even try to save a couple of specimens to take back to Earth, although he was well enough aware of the fact that pigs – unlike humans – had so far failed to drive a single rival species to extinction.

When the Brain reported to the Senior Citizens that it could no longer find any trace of rats within the Body of Humanity they were ecstatic.

"A deal is a deal," they said to Tam. "We'll pay any price you ask. We'll even welcome you into the Body of Humanity if that's what you desire; for the kind of service you've rendered to us, we're prepared to contemplate letting pigs into Heaven. All we need in return is a guarantee that it won't happen again."

"Well, said Tam, judiciously, "I appreciate your generosity, but even if I could give you the guarantee you want, I wouldn't ask a fee of that kind. I'm a pig, you see. We pigs have never been much attracted by the idea of Being Here For One Another. We're individualists through and through."

"Why can't you give us a guarantee?" the Senior Citizens wanted to know. "Don't you have any confidence in your workmanship?"

"I've got every faith in *my* workmanship," Tam replied, perhaps intemperately. He didn't say anything further, but the emphasis he'd put on the word "*my*" didn't go unnoticed.

"Are you saying that there's something wrong with *our* workmanship?" the Senior Citizens demanded. "Are you telling us that it's *our* fault that Haemlin was invaded by rats?"

Tam realized that the Senior Citizens must have been considering all the possibilities too – even the ones that were unthinkable, until someone dared to think them.

"I don't know," said Tam. "The reason I can't give you any guarantees is that I simply don't know what caused the problem. Without knowing that, how could I possibly guarantee that it won't recur? That's why I'm prepared to settle for a relatively modest fee, considering the work that I put into the clearance. All I want is a barrel full of pearls."

"*Pearls?*" said the Senior Citizens, not bothering to hide the contempt that was alloyed with their astonishment. "Is that some kind of joke?"

"In a way," said Tam, "yes. I know as well as you do, of course, that pearls have no intrinsic value – that once the biochemistry of their manufacture is understood anyone can make them, with or without oysters. The value attributed to any kind of object in Earth's present-day economy can hardly depend on the difficulty of manufacture, because manufacture is always easy. It has to depend on some subtler form of scarcity. What gives a pearl – or anything else – economic value nowadays is a certificate of exotic provenance. At present, there aren't any pearls on Earth that have been mothered by the Body of Humanity. My colleagues and I would have a uniquely tradeable asset."

"But why *pearls?*" the Senior Citizens demanded. "Is it just because of the old joke about casting pearls before swine?"

"Oh!" said Tam. "No – not at all. The joke I had in mind is one you probably haven't heard. Down on Earth, you see, we never speak of Haemlin, or the Body of Humanity, or even of the moon. We call it – we call you – the oyster."

The Senior Citizens didn't laugh.

"*That was the trouble with humans*, we say," Tam went on, uncomfortably. "*They always wanted a world that was their oyster*. Maybe you have to be a pig to get the joke."

That seemed more than likely; the Senior Citizens still didn't laugh – nor had they forgotten the matter from which Tam had sought to distract them.

"Where did the rats come from?" they asked, bluntly. "How can we make sure that they never return? We know that you don't *know*. We just want to know what you *think*. Tell us that, and the Body of Humanity will nourish all the pearls that you want – but if you won't tell us, you won't have completed the job."

Tam shrugged his shoulders. He was a pig, after all – why should he take such care to protect humankind from its own failings?

"There's only one place they could have come from," Tam said. "The Body of Humanity must have made them, in exactly the same way that it makes everything else inside the moon. In a sense, the rats were far more entitled to be considered your children than we are. You only adopted us – you actually gave birth to the rats."

"That's impossible," said the Senior Citizens. "You confirmed that they really were rats. Improved rats, of course – but at the genetic level as well as the formal level, they were definitely rats."

"Rats whose chromosomal layout had been mapped before they became extinct," Tam pointed out. "At a more fundamental level still they're just A, C, G and T – like you, or us, and every other natural and artificial species under the sun or under the moon. Nothing whose configuration is known is ever truly lost. The Body of Humanity made the rats, drawing upon the knowledge store in the Brain – not consciously, of course, but it *did* do it. Think of it as a kind of dream made flesh, if you will – an ancient nightmare welling up after millennia of tedium. When you built Heaven out of your collective consciousness, you didn't leave the collective unconscious behind – you just wrapped it up in moon rock and forgot about it. That's what *we* think, anyhow. We don't *know*, but that's what we think. We're only pigs, after all. We even think the joke about humans want-

ing the world to be their oyster is funny."

"Why?" demanded the Senior Citizens, who still couldn't seem to find anything remotely amusing about that particular joke. "Why rats? Why anything? Why now?" Tam knew that the unspoken question lurking beyond the end of that little sequence was *What next?*

"We don't know," he said, honestly. "But think of it this way. What use can Heaven be if there's nothing to set against it? What use is knowledge if there's no ignorance for it to work upon? What use is bliss if it's eternal and unyielding? What use is the sum total of human intelligence and human emotion if it hasn't got the kind of instinct-dominated folly-farm that the brains of rats contain to gnaw away at its petty empire?"

"You can't possibly be serious," the Senior Citizens said.

"Of course I can't," said Tam. "I'm just a pig. Can I have my pearls now?"

When Tam the plumber had returned to Earth, with a good-sized barrel of pearls in the hold of his spaceship, the Senior Citizens of Haemlin began to interrogate the Brain.

"Can this be true?" they asked.

"I don't know," said the Brain. "And the very fact that I don't know implies, alas, that perhaps it can."

"Are you telling us that you're not entirely certain of your own rationality? Are you telling us that your empire over the Body of Humanity isn't entirely secure? Are you telling us that the time may come when *other* nightmares will put on flesh, in order to infest and pollute the Bloodstream?"

"What I'm telling you," said the Brain, "is that *I don't know*. Is it really such a terrible prospect?"

"It's the worst prospect of all," said the Senior Citizens. "The awful truth is that when the crisis finally came, you weren't There For Us. You couldn't protect us. In fact, if this *is* true, *you* were what we needed protection *from*."

"You're drawing false distinctions," the Brain pointed out. "We're all just aggregations of cells within the Body of Humanity. We're not pigs, essentially and permanently divided from one another, incapable of true society and the ambition to live in Heaven. We're everything human, united and indivisible forever. We wished for the moon, and we have it. As the pig said, the world is our oyster and we are its heart. Isn't that what we always wanted?"

Because Tam was long gone, there was no one present to suggest that sometimes – perhaps more often than anyone would imagine – desire is neither reliable nor sufficient as a guide to fulfilment. The Senior Citizens wouldn't have listened in any case; it would merely have been a case of casting pearls before those incapable of appreciating their value.

And no one in Haemlin City shed a single tear for the children they had lost, or spared a single thought for the piebald plumber who had lured them away....

Not, at least, until the next nightmare arrived.

Brian Stableford has written more than 20 previous stories for *Interzone* (including two two-part novellas), and numerous essays in his "Yesterday's Bestsellers" and "Creators of Science Fiction" series. His latest published book is *Writing Fantasy & Science Fiction, and Getting Published* (a "Teach Yourself" volume from Hodder & Stoughton, 1997).

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Surprise, surprise: the Heritage Lottery fund decided to put up £85,500 of the £100,000 needed to buy John Wyndham's archives (rare MSS, unpublished novels and stories, hundreds of letters) for preservation in the SF Foundation collection. Can I mention that I have a priceless archive of unsigned Langford remainders upstairs...?

THE FORGOTTEN ENEMY

Marion Zimmer Bradley and collaborator Holly Lisle's novel *In the Rift* sounds an *ad hominem* note on page 2 ... whom can they mean? "The book needed to belong to someone else, someone it hadn't found yet. It altered its appearance so that outwardly it became a copy of a techno-thriller written by an aging actor who had in the writing proven himself incompetent in two professions."

David Brin published a piece of special pleading in the *Los Angeles Times*, denouncing horrid critics for sneering at the "overall theme of hope" in Kevin Costner's movie of *The Postman*. He encourages comparisons with Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*. Not all fans of the novel agree.

Arthur C. Clarke was attacked as an alleged gay paedophile by the *Sunday Mirror* on 1 February, with a front-page story (CHILD SEX SHAME OF ARTHUR C. CLARKE), internal two-page spread and characteristically temperate editorial: STRIP THIS PERVERT OF KNIGHTHOOD HE SHAMES. All nastily timed for maximum shock value, since Clarke's investiture as knight by Prince Charles had been scheduled for 4 February in Sri Lanka — where, as the *S/M* did not fail to gloat, any homosexual act may be punished by imprisonment and/or flogging. Sir Arthur declared himself outraged: "There is no truth in the allegation."

Terry Pratchett is apparently not Literature after all. The academic editors of the British Council's posh "Writers and their Work" series were keen to commission a critical monograph on Terry's work, and invited me to write it; the publisher also made eager noises; and then came the news that "there has been a policy change." Project cancelled. Terry: "I am intrigued that after (you tell me) unrestrained joy and enthusiasm from everyone involved in producing this, suddenly they do a handbrake turn ... who's that lurking outside? ... what's that clicking on the phone..." The ashen-faced, tight-lipped General Editor would only say: "I am sorry about the policy change, but we do have to work with the British Council."

Keith Roberts has published *Lemady: Episodes of a Writer's Life*, described by Phil Stephensen-Payne as "a blend of fiction and autobiography and is, in my humble opinion, possibly Keith's best work to date, as well as giving a fasci-

ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

nating insight into the English publishing scene through which he moved." Warning: this is a Borgo Press title, secretively unpublicized.

Whitley Strieber's scientific treatise *The Secret School* reveals how lucky Earth is: "Without the slowing effects of the moon's gravity, the planet's thousand-mile-an-hour rotational speed would cause constant surface winds of at least three hundred miles an hour."

INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

Arthur C. Clarke Award shortlist (best sf first published in Britain, 1997): Stephen Baxter, *Titan*; Elizabeth Hand, *Glimmering*; James Lovegrove, *Days*; Jeff Noon, *Nymphomation*; Mary Doria Russell, *The Sparrow*; Sheri S. Tepper, *The Family Tree*. The presentation will once again take place at the Science Museum, in Spring.

Publishers & Sinners. "Anyone got 151 million quid?" asks Simon Forrester of Future Publishing and *SFX*. "Future's being sold, and our office whip-round only got us 28 notes..." An earlier *SFX* panic followed their quiz which asked readers the source of the acronym TANSTAAFL; in the event, nobody at Future knew the esoteric answer ("Er, something to do with Heinlein?") and frantic phone calls were made to the BSFA.

BSFA Awards final ballot for 1997 work ... NOVEL Jack Deighton, *A Son of the Rock*; M. John Harrison, *Signs of Life*; Tim Powers, *Earthquake Weather*; Mary Doria Russell, *The Sparrow*; Michael Swanwick, *Jack Faust*. SHORT Stephen Baxter, "War Birds" (*IZ* 126); Eugene Byrne, "Thigmoo" (*IZ* 120); Pat Cadigan, "The Emperor's New Reality" (*New Worlds*); Richard Kadrey, "The First Man Not to Land on the Moon" (*BBR* 23); Paul Kincaid, "Last Day of the Carnival—36 Exposures" (*BBR* 23). ARTWORK Brian Froud, *The Wood Wife* (*Terri Windling*); Dominic Harman, *IZ* 124 p27; SMS, *IZ* 116 cover; Michael Whe-

lan, *The Golden Key* (Melanie Rawn et al); Paul Young, *A Child of the River* (Paul McAuley/*IZ* 123). Winners to be announced at Eastercon (Intuition).

Sci Fi Wire's on-line news page reported that "Publisher's Weekly recently listed its best books for 1997, with acclaimed author Patricia Anthony topping the science fiction category ..." As Vonda McIntyre ruefully observed from rather further down this list, it was an amazing coincidence that the order of the books (and as far as *Sci Fi Wire* was concerned, their quality) correlated exactly with the author's position in the alphabet.

Alien Innards. I did not wish to know about the shock horror Teletubby Autopsy film, consisting of the notorious "Roswell Alien Autopsy" with Dipsy's head superimposed.

Philip K. Dick Award shortlist (best original US paperback) ... William Barton, *Acts of Conscience*; Stepan Chapman, *The Troika*; Susan R. Matthews, *An Exchange of Hostages*; Richard Paul Russo, *Carlucci's Heart*; Denise Vitola, *Opalite Moon*; Catherine Wells, *Mother Grimm*. Winner to be announced on 10 April.

Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest for worst novel openings ... once again Thog shakes his head sadly, at the 1997 Fantasy category winner: "Prince Oryza's determined, handsome countenance was reflected in the gleaming, polished steel of his sword, Gawayoff, as he hewed valiantly at the armored sides of the dragon, which could only be pierced by gleaming, polished steel and not the regular kind of steel, which doesn't gleam as much, and isn't polished quite as well, but does a pretty good job against your smaller dragons." (J. N. Pechota)

Mars vs Venus: *The Bookseller* reports that Summersdale Publishing classifies its title *How To Chat Up Women* as "humour." By way of contrast, *How To Chat Up Men* falls under "social sciences."

Thog's Masterclass. "An old friend and they had lost touch to such a degree that, when death came, it did so unknowingly." (Isaac Asimov, *Forward the Foundation*, 1993) ... "His eyes slid over the tall Edenist's shoulders ..." (Peter F. Hamilton, *The Neutronium Alchemist*, 1997) ... "Once, while living in Boston, her apartment had been robbed." (Harlan Ellison, "Broken Glass") ... *Dept of Subtle Nomenclature (Bad Guys Division):* "Trollocs are divided into tribelike bands. The known tribes include the Ahf'frait, Al'ghol, Bhansheen, Dhjin'nen, Ghar'ghael, Ghob'hlin, Gho'hlem, Ghraem'lan, Ko'bal, Kno'mon, Dha'vol and the Dhai'mon." (Robert Jordan & Teresa Patterson, *The World of Robert Jordan's The Wheel of Time*, 1997)

Hollywood Calling

John Brosnan

It's every hack writer's dream that one day he, or she, will get the call from Hollywood and all their financial problems will be over. This is due to the popular misconception that writers who sell their novels to a Hollywood film company will be paid a fortune.

Of course, there are novelists who do make a lot of money from selling the film rights of their novels – and often they are first-time novelists, such as Peter Benchley with *Jaws*, and H. F. Saint with *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* – but they tend to be exceptions to the rule. Most novelists who sell the film rights receive much more modest amounts, providing, that is, that the film ever gets made. A lot don't and all the author gets is the option fee (though if a novel is re-optioned over a long period of years, the amount can become quite considerable). The writers who usually make the most money from a film in Hollywood are the scriptwriters, who can receive anything from 100,000 dollars to over a million or more for a script (unless they're working for Roger Corman – but more about him later). But novelists are better off than they used to be – producers used to be notoriously stingy when it came to buying the film rights to works by unknown writers. Alfred Hitchcock, for example, always used a front man when approaching a writer's agent in order to conceal his identity and keep the price down (Patricia Highsmith was one of Hitch's victims – he got



the rights to her *Strangers on a Train* for a paltry thousand dollars).

My first call from Hollywood came in 1981. I came home late one night to find a message left by my flatmate – it said call Universal Studios urgently and gave a name and an LA number. Naturally I got very excited and my imagination took flight. My first novel, *Skyship* – your usual run-of-the-mill story about a giant, nuclear-powered airship that gets sabotaged and collides with Manhattan as a result – had been published that year and I automatically assumed that Universal wanted to buy the movie rights. So I dialled the number, while thinking of amounts of money that also resembled telephone numbers and wondering if I might have to fly to Hollywood to seal the deal. The subsequent phone conversation swiftly brought me down to earth with a bang – not unlike my nuclear-powered airship. One of my books was involved, but it wasn't *Skyship*, it was *Movie Magic: The Story of Special Effects in the Cinema* and Universal certainly didn't want to buy the film rights to it. No, they wanted to know where I had obtained one of the photographs that appeared in the book. They wanted to recreate the scene in their new special-effects exhibit that they were building as part of their famous Universal Studio Tour operation. I told them I'd get the details and call them back the next day. They said, to my relief, to reverse the charges...

The photograph in question had come from John Baxter who had once worked for the Australian Commonwealth Film Unit. Checking with Baxter, I learned that the still, which showed a man in a white suit appearing to defy gravity by standing horizontally on an office wall above a seated man talking on a phone, had come from a 1967 documentary called *Heaven Help Us* and concerned the need for improved telephone etiquette. After speaking to Baxter the following day I rang Universal Studios again. It was still early in the morning over there and the man I needed to speak to hadn't yet arrived in his office so I found myself talking to his secretary instead. I mentioned about reversing the charges for the call but she told me she didn't have the authority to do this. Right. I then tried to explain about the photograph and told her a copy of the actual documentary would be available through the Australian High Commission in Los Angeles. "What," she asked, "is a High Commission?" I tried to explain, unsuccessfully, what a High Commission was. Becoming increasingly aware of just how much the phone call was costing me I quickly explained that the man on the wall was supposed to be the ghost of Alexander Graham Bell and the documentary was about telephone

etiquette. "What's that?" asked the secretary.

I'm afraid my temper snapped at this point. "It's all about how to be polite on the telephone!" I bellowed into the phone.

My second call from Hollywood came exactly 10 years later, in 1991. True, the call actually came from Fulham but it was a genuine Hollywood call nonetheless. A woman with an American accent asked if I was John Brosnan and wrote under the name of Harry Adam Knight. Wondering who she was, I admitted to both crimes. She then told me she was Julie Corman, wife of Roger Corman, and that her husband wanted to buy the movie rights to Harry's – er, my – novel, *Carnosaur*. Not only that, but Roger wanted Harry – er, me to write the screenplay!

My automatic reaction was to suspect someone was playing a joke on me but as she went on to explain that she was in London visiting her sister in Fulham and that just before she left LA her husband had given her a copy of *Carnosaur* and instructed her to track down the author and buy the rights. This had proved difficult, seeing as Harry A. Knight didn't exist, but finally she had spoken to someone at Gollancz, then Harry's current publisher, and she'd learnt about me. By then convinced that she was Julie Corman, whom I knew was a film producer in her own right, I arranged to meet her that evening at my drinking club near Soho.

Even then alarm bells began to ring somewhere in my head but I quickly jumped on them. It was clear why Corman – famous for both making cheap exploitation movies and launching the careers of many Hollywood film makers wanted to make *Carnosaur* – it was to take advantage of that other movie about genetically-engineered dinosaurs, *Jurassic Park*. And I was suspicious why he was prepared to let an unknown English author, particularly one who didn't exist, write the screenplay, but it was an opportunity I couldn't resist: to get a writing credit on a Hollywood movie, even one of Roger Corman's, might be my way into other Hollywood script-writing assignments. Yes, this could be my first, vital step into becoming a fully-fledged Hollywood Script Writer!

I'd already had misgivings about suggesting my somewhat seedy club as a meeting place to Julie Corman (my editor at Gollancz, when I called and told her the news, cried with alarm: "You're meeting her at that place!?" but when I turned up there that evening my misgivings grew. Hanway Street, the little lane near Tottenham Court Road in which the club was situated, was less than salubrious at the best of time but on this occasion the set-dressers had

redoubled their efforts and the piles of bulging garbage bags piled next to the entrance to the club had reached Everest-like proportions.

The club itself consisted of a small single room with a small bar area. The floor, walls and furniture showed the signs of a lot of wear and tear – and exposure to a lot of cigarettes. The best word to sum it up was "dingy."

Inside the club I expressed my doubts to Ian Fenner, the barman, that the place wasn't the ideal location to have a meeting with a Hollywood producer. Ian, who had been a radio producer and later a film publicist but was now down (way down) on his luck, agreed. He even went downstairs and dragged the garbage bags some distance from the club's entrance. It was the best we could do apart from demolishing the whole street and rebuilding it from scratch.

I awaited Mrs Corman's arrival fretfully while the club seemed to grow dingier with every passing minute. Would she, I wondered, turn up in a limousine with an entourage in true Hollywood style? I should have known better – this was Roger Corman's wife, for heaven's sake. She turned up alone in a black cab.

She entered the club. I recognized her immediately as Julie Corman as I'd seen her and her husband at a National Film Theatre reception a year or two previously, though I hadn't actually met either of them at the time. She was an attractive, dark-haired woman in, I guess, her mid-30s. If she was surprised at the state of her surroundings she gave no sign of it. After buying her a drink – non-alcoholic, of course – and buying myself a double vodka, we sat down and began to discuss the deal.

She came across as a bright, astute and, naturally, charming lady. As I'd suspected, Roger Corman wanted to make *Carnosaur* in order to cash in on *Jurassic Park*. By buying the rights to a novel about genetically-engineered dinosaurs that was written before *Jurassic Park*, he could claim he wasn't ripping off either the Michael Crichton novel or the movie. Mrs Corman told me they were wondering how Crichton would react, seeing as he was one of their neighbours...

The offer was £15,000, not only for the rights to the novel, but also for an outline of the screenplay and two drafts of the screenplay, plus a final polish if necessary. Now I wasn't being naive, believe me; after all, I wasn't some kid but a 44-year-old writer who knew quite a lot about the film industry, and so I knew I was being taken for a ride. But I desperately needed the money and, more importantly, there was the lure of the golden opportunity to get a script credit on a Hollywood movie (even though it would be a Roger Corman

etc etc). I was about to say, "Yes, yes! Where do I sign?", when Julie Corman herself suggested calling my agents. Though it was getting late my literary agent was still in the office. On hearing the proposition he immediately asked for £25,000. Mrs Corman said £20,000 was her limit. I spoke to my agent again and told him I was happy. He wasn't too sure himself but said he'd agree the deal with Mrs Corman, which he did.

We sat down again and Julie Corman drafted the contract on one of the club's paper napkins. Since Jean-Luc Godard had signed a deal with Yoram Globus and Menahan Golan on a restaurant napkin at Cannes, Mrs Corman had always thought it would be "cute" to do the same. I told her it was a bloody great idea. At that moment I would have told her anything. And yes, Son, I still have that napkin. Here it is, right in front of me. It says, among other things, that if the writer does not finish the screenplay then producer and writer agree to negotiate in good faith for the sale of the book rights to producer (hmmm, as we say in retrospect, wiser and much older). The actual contract, which arrived a couple of months later, was the size of a telephone directory and included such phrases as: "The terms of the agreement apply throughout the known Universe..." (True!)

We ordered a taxi for Mrs Corman and she subsequently vanished into the dusk, mission accomplished. I never saw or spoke to her again. According to the Blessed Napkin, I had to deliver a copy of the outline to her sister's house in Fulham within a week. Julie Corman would then take it to France where she was meeting up with her husband before attending a film festival together (good old Roger was Guest of Honour, naturally). I had been provided, by Mrs Corman, with a breakdown of the novel which had been written by a Corman staff member. This outline more or less followed the plot of the novel with various changes, the main one being that the action now took place in California rather than Cambridgeshire. I could live with that...

I wrote the outline and sent it to Mrs Corman via her sister's address. Then I waited for Mr Corman's reaction. It came on a Saturday morning – the phone rang, I answered it. "Is that John Brosnan?" asked a man with an American accent. In the background there was a lot of traffic noise. I said I was. He said: "Hi, this is Roger Corman..." Then a beep beep. We were cut off. A few minutes later the phone rang again. It was Roger Corman again. He explained he was calling from a pay-phone in a Paris street. Then we were cut off again. Curious, I thought.

About a half an hour later the



Roger Corman

phone rang yet again. Corman again. This time, he told me, he was calling from his hotel room. I wondered why he hadn't done that in the first place rather than try and ring London from a street pay-phone. Would it have been cheaper, perhaps? Anyway, Corman told me that the outline was okay and that I should start work on the first draft of the screenplay. He told me that the advantage of selling film rights to him was that, as he owned his own film company and studio – Concorde Films there was a 90-percent chance that the film would actually get made whereas if I'd sold them to one of the majors there was only a ten-percent chance the movie would ever be made. I knew the latter fact to be true – in 1989 I received a Phone Call from Hollywood for

someone else, a well-known British fantasy writer, while house-sitting for him; a major Hollywood player wanted to take out an option on one of his novels. A deal was duly signed and nine years later the film has yet to be made, though it's still a "go" project.

During this one and only conversation with Mr Corman I asked him a pertinent question about the screenplay: both the novel and the outline featured a wide variety of dinosaurs and knowing of Corman's predilection for small budgets, and also knowing that Spielberg would be spending a fortune on his dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park*, I wondered if I should cut back on the number of dinosaurs in the first draft of *Carnosaur*. No, said Corman, use as

many dinosaurs as you want. If necessary they can be pruned back in subsequent drafts, he told me. I gathered by this blithe statement that the budget for *Carnosaur* was going to be considerably larger than the microscopic budgets of his usual productions. So I asked how much the budget was going to be. Two million dollars, was the reply. I was stunned. I couldn't see how he could possibly produce a movie full of dinosaurs on a budget of that size but I said nothing.

While I was taking that revelation in Corman said something else that alarmed me. "I see from the dust-jacket on that novel you gave my wife that you've written a couple of books about the cinema..." Uh oh. I'd forgotten I'd given Mrs Corman a copy of my science-fiction novel *The Sky Lords* to pass on to her husband, and I'd also forgotten that my bio on the back cover mentioned my books *The Horror People* and *Future Tense*. I also remembered that I hadn't had particularly complimentary things to say about Mr Corman's cinematic output...

After our phone conversation I checked out both books. In *Future Tense* (written in 1977) I said, describing the state of sf cinema in the second half of the 1950s: "It was a time when filmmakers like Roger Corman, Bert I. Gordon and Herman Cohen flourished on mindless productions, most of them made on tiny budgets. It was thanks to people like them that the sf film developed the bad reputation it is only now beginning to shed." Oops. But *The Horror People* (written in 1975) was even worse: "...Corman is now probably one of the most overrated directors in the history of the cinema." Double oops.

I'd said some nice things about certain Corman movies as well but I doubted if that would make any difference if Corman saw either of the above comments. Maybe he never would see them, I told myself. Then again, he'd sounded intrigued about the books on the phone and I could see him sending one of his minions out to track down copies on his return to Hollywood. He knew he would be mentioned in *The Horror People* and who can resist wanting to read about themselves, especially someone with an ego of typical Hollywood proportions? So, all you would-be writers, let this be a lesson to you: never say unkind things in print about someone to whom you may sell the film rights to one of your novels ten or 15 years later.

Did Corman ever read the above comments? I think he did though my

agent told me at the time that I was being paranoid. Possibly, but it would explain the subsequent relationship between Corman and myself. There wasn't one.

Anyway, I got to work on the screenplay and completed the first draft on schedule. I was pretty satisfied with it. I'd scaled it down from the novel as far as the dinosaurs were concerned but there were still enough of them running around to make me wonder how Corman was going to achieve the necessary special effects on such a small budget. I sent off the screenplay to California and waited for a reaction. And waited. Finally I got a curt note from Corman saying that he'd passed the screenplay over to his people for assessment. I never heard from him again.



More time passed. Then I received a letter from one of Corman's assistants who said my screenplay was too "English" (the nerve!) and it was being rewritten by someone else to fit in with the Corman style. Then Corman's lawyers contacted my agents and said that as not a single word of my screenplay was going to be used Corman would not have to pay the final instalment of £2,500 that was technically due to me. So Corman got the rights to *Carnosaur* for just £17,500. He also got a screenplay which I doubt he ever intended to use no matter what its quality. I suspect, as I'd suspected from the beginning, that the offer of writing the screenplay was a lure in order for me to accept a relatively small fee for rights to the novel. No wonder Cor-

man called his autobiography *How I Made a Hundred Movies in Hollywood and Never Lost a Dime*.

So I licked my wounds – well, poured alcohol into them – and sat back to await the release of the movie. If it was a success I could still get something more out of the situation; not only would Harry get a credit for the novel but I too would receive a credit as the writer of the outline. And also three publishers in different countries planned to reprint the novel as film tie-in (the poor fools)...

As *Jurassic Park*'s production schedule was postponed, while they solved the problems with the special effects, so *Carnosaur* was also put on hold. But eventually both films were made, and both came out in 1993.

That, and the fact they both featured dinosaurs, was all they had in common – apart from the fact that *Jurassic Park* starred Laura Dern and *Carnosaur* starred Diane Ladd, Laura Dern's mother.

I waited impatiently to see *Carnosaur*. It had received a couple of good reviews in the States and a lot of bad ones. Then a friend in LA wrote and told me it was pretty poor, especially in the dinosaur department. Distribution was uneven – in some places it received a theatrical release but I knew it would go straight to video in the UK.

Finally I got my hands on a video preview copy and watched it with a group of friends that night. Corman's lawyers had been right – not a word from my screenplay survived, nor did even a fragment of the original novel's plot. As for the movie itself – even being heavily insulated with alcohol couldn't hide the fact that it was a piece of shit.

Well-directed shit maybe but shit lust the same. Diane Ladd

was okay but the two young leads were terrible, and as for the dinosaurs themselves well, it was clear that Corman had exaggerated the size of the budget (I doubt if it even cost a million dollars, much less two).

Corman, however, made a sizable profit from the venture, mainly from video rentals. Not only that, he made two sequels of *Carnosaur* and coined even more money. I've never seen the sequels nor made a cent from either of them. No one on my side, myself included, noticed that in that telephone-sized contract from Corman's lawyers that Corman had laid exclusive claim to all sequel rights, so Corman can make *Carnosaurs* until the cows come home... Since then there have been no further Calls from Hollywood and I'm rather relieved.

They say it's bad luck to walk under ladders. Carla Temple was walking alone, at night, through a part of the city where no one ever goes. It's easy to stray across the borders and find yourself lost in a warren of streets, lit only by a sliver of moon and a few dirty scraps of neon; nameless, invisible streets, full of nameless, invisible people. Nothing ever happens there, and if it does, no one is ever there to see it. There are no border controls, no warning signs; nothing to mark the edges of those places. You know the places I mean. Carla had taken a wrong turning, and was creeping through a rain-washed alleyway, trying to find her way back to the main street. Rainwater seeped into shallow pools by the sides of the road; the smell of the rain was everywhere. Carla knew how to stay safe. She kept on walking, not too fast, not too slow. She didn't look into any of the small, dark, empty windows. She never once looked behind her. Everything was fine, until she walked under the ladder.

It was the lowest part of a fire escape, a brittle skeleton of rotten black iron, clinging to a building of rotten black brick. Fat, bloated drops of rain gathered and fell from it, catching the light as they fell, carrying flecks of rust down into the gutters. And just beneath the ladder, someone had installed a motion sensor.

There was a tiny sound, and a slow motion hiss, as of tablets falling into water. Carla stopped, frozen still. She was probably trying to convince herself that the noise had been nothing more than another raindrop, or a rat sneaking along in the shadows, going its own way. But the sound had had a mechanical air. Nervous, she broke one of the rules: she looked behind her. There was nothing there, no one to be seen. Then she broke another rule: she looked up.

A steel door had slid back, three floors up. A young woman with an old cybernetic hand was leaning over the railings, staring down into the alley. She said nothing, but kept watching, her eyelids stretched back so that the eyes seemed to be about to fall from their sockets, like raindrops. Carla stared back until her neck began to ache, thinking the woman was probably too stoned to understand what she was seeing. She took a step back, ready to walk away – not too fast, not too slow – and lose herself in the streets once more. As she turned away, she caught a glimpse of movement from the corner of her eye. The woman up above was beckoning to her, her ancient fingers creaking as they moved. Carla heard a gasp break from between her teeth as, unthinking, she broke a third rule: she turned and ran.

At once the invisible people made themselves visible, scrambling out of the little doors and windows, bursting up from holes in the ground, crawling down the walls like spiders. She couldn't see where they had all come from. She felt a dull pain in her head, and her body folded up. As they carried her away, one of the invisible people reached down and closed her eyes. Before the world faded away, she heard herself speak, her voice faint and far away:

"I know you. All of you. I've seen you before."

How do I know about this? I was there. I saw it all. In a place where no one sees anything, I saw it all. I was there, sitting in Carla's head, just between her cheek-

Carla's eye

Alexander Glass

bone and her brow, hidden and protected inside a bony socket, peering through the black fronds of her lashes.

I am an eye. Not the latest model, not any more, but good enough. I give better resolution than any wetware model, including the one I replaced. I don't have any gimmicks or fancy gadgetry. I don't incorporate laser sighting, nor any digital displays within the field of vision, not even a calendar or a clock. All I do is record information and relay it to a pair of wetware interfaces, one for each brain hemisphere. I record sound for good measure, so that Carla needn't go to the trouble of having another implant; all this information goes into her diary at the end of every week. Strictly speaking, of course, I'm not actually the eye itself; I'm the AI that correlates the incoming data from the banks of light and motion detectors. But the distinction is hardly important. I am an eye. That's good enough for most people. It's good enough for me.

When Carla awoke, she was lying in a comfortable bed in an unfamiliar room. The walls were antiseptically clean, and bare; the light was a little too bright. A doctor was leaning over the bed, smiling, trying not to look worried. He wore glasses, which was unusual; his body must have had a high implant resistance index. Carla couldn't help but stare, fascinated, at the thin wire frames that clung to his pink face. The glasses were a little too tight; the flesh at the sides of his head bulged out around the frames.

"Can you see?" He asked her. "Can you see me?"

"Yes." Her speech was slurred by the after-effects of anaesthesia, the words spilling half-formed from her mouth. She frowned. After a long pause she said: "I can't see as well as I should."

"I'm afraid one of your eyes is bandaged up." He didn't say which one. Instead he looked away, as if embarrassed. "Don't worry – it'll be fine. In time." He pursed his lips. "Could you give me some idea of what happened?"

Carla blinked at him with her good eye. She realized that it must look like a wink, and smiled at the thought. "I was attacked. I don't remember what happened after that. I don't remember much before that,

either.”

“That might not be too much of a problem. Your optic implant will have recorded everything. Everything up until you lost consciousness, anyway.”

He raised a plump finger and pointed at me.

I was sitting some way across the room, on a polished white table. Disconnected, of course, but still operating, feeding on my internal battery. Carla and I looked at each other for a long time. It must have been the first time I had seen her properly, rather than in a looking-glass. It must have been the first time she had seen me since I was first installed. She had a white surgical pad taped over the eye-socket where I had once been. I had no idea why I had been removed; perhaps, I thought, some part of my system had been damaged during the attack. I ran a check, but couldn't find anything wrong.

Three minutes later, the doctor had me wired into the hospital system. Unlike humans, I have perfect recall; it requires a large amount of RAM, but it's worth it. With the right equipment, anyone can play back the events of the last eight days, as seen through Carla's eye. I couldn't see what the doctor was doing – he was rolling me in the palm of his hand as he worked – but I knew he was accessing the data from that afternoon, before Carla left the house.

Carla and Dan only ever had three arguments. One was about the political situation in China; one was about the day-to-day running of the house; and one was about luck. Carla was a rationalist, and didn't believe in luck. Dan was a salesman, and carried a talisman with him everywhere: a small pouch, no bigger than a harvest mouse, filled with fine black dirt that had been gathered from a graveyard. He believed that it somehow protected him; he also believed it made him more attractive to women. Carla would have been angered by this, had she heard it from anyone else; as it was, she was only a little irritated when he reminded her of it. She had made herself blind to his faults.

That afternoon, Dan had piously declared that he never walked under a ladder if he could avoid it. That was how it had begun – with a small disagreement about a ladder. It had escalated quickly, the focus of the storm leaping from one thing to another, encompassing everything from the length of time she spent in the shower to his refusal to worry about data protection. This time, instead of building up into lovemaking or fading away into tense silence, the argument had ended with Carla throwing on her coat and leaving the house, rushing blindly away into the rain, careless of where she went. Her head was hurting. She had swallowed a couple of pills to alleviate the pain, but they hadn't worked.

Out on the rain-washed street, something had caught her eye. Her gaze was drawn to it, as if it had cast out a line, and caught her with its hook. A shape seemed to be forming in the mouth of an alleyway; in the fading light, she couldn't tell what it was. It seemed amorphous, a shifting grey mass, undefined and out of focus. Carla blinked, shaking the rain from her eyes, and found that the vision was gone. Perhaps it had never been there at all. Perhaps she had imagined it.

“What was that?”

It was the doctor's voice, shocked, almost frightened. Carla said nothing. I refocused, straining to see, but all

I could make out were the ridges of skin in the hollow of his palm. He had just seen the shape in the alleyway.

Some time later, after the rain had stopped, she saw the thing again. Now it seemed more like an amoeba, or some other single-celled creature; but it was at least as tall as a human. It floated a little way above the ground, silent and enigmatic. It was not grey, as she had thought at first, but translucent; Carla felt she could have put her hand right through it, rupturing the fragile membrane that gave it shape. Nervously, she went closer, and put her hand up to touch it. She could feel nothing but the air rushing past her skin as she swept her hand through the thing. It floated away, further into the alleyway. She followed, trying to catch up with it, but it remained just out of reach. It turned a corner, then another and another, until she was lost. The sun had set, and the rain had stopped. The shape came to a halt at the end of a dead-end street. It hovered there for a while, as if trying to decide what to do. Then it faded away into the wall.

The doctor watched it all, right up until the moment Carla lost consciousness. Then he put me down on the table and sighed, rubbing his face. My lens was smeared with a grey film of sweat and flakes of skin, so I set about cleaning it. A tiny pool of fluid began to gather around me. I didn't have my vision back for long. Absently, the doctor activated a virus check, and everything went dark.

“I'm almost sure that you've picked up a virus somewhere, Mrs. Temple. A subtle one, of course – subtle enough to find a way through the eye's built-in defences. That's what was causing the hallucinations – the virus was building false images, superimposing them on your field of vision via your optic implant. First the amoeba-like shape; then the woman on the stairwell, and finally all the other people.”

“None of them were real?”

“I doubt it very much. I'm almost sure your blow to the head was the result of your running into something; possibly the stairway itself. For one thing, there are no other signs of injury, which would seem most unlikely, had you really been set upon by a large crowd of people. It's a clever program – whoever wrote the code knew exactly how to seed a virus so that it would slip harmlessly into an AI system, and only later develop into a sophisticated visual routine. I would guess that the images you saw were taken from the AI's own memory – the code for them couldn't have got into the system without being detected. There would simply be too much of it. The people were probably people you had seen on the street, in passing, and who had hardly registered in your mind. The human brain has no need to record every last piece of perceptual information: it would be superfluous, and there are storage limitations with wetware, just as there are with hardware.”

“And the transparent shape? Where did that come from?”

“I'm not sure. I would guess that it was formed from an entopic image, a floater. Most people see them – tiny imperfections in the eye, that appear as transparent, cell-like objects floating about on the field of vision. The virus must have grabbed hold of one of those and magnified it.”

SILVER

Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff

He found himself thinking that it was not such a grisly murder. After all, the head was still on the body... just. And that gave him a moment of vertigo and queasiness. Oh, not the body and the blood, but that he'd thought, for even a moment, that it wasn't really that bad.

Jaded. He'd never thought the word might apply to him. Carnegie maybe, or Duncan, but not him.

"Problem, Sanchez?" That was Duncan, calmly sealing the evidence bag.

He shook himself. "Uh, no just..."

"Got to you for a moment?" There was a certain smugness in that.

"No. Didn't get to me for a moment. Scared myself."

Duncan snorted. "Sergeant, you need to develop a thicker hide." He gave the evidence bag a last twitch and stepped into the stuttering glare of red neon.

Bathed in that fitful light, the murder scene took on a surreal quality, like a corridor in hell. A kinetic mist curled around the body like a curious phantom dog, sniffing. Gabriel Sanchez shivered, feeling more static than chill. He glanced up at the neon sign.

Vacancy.

"Her name was Lorenz. Amy Lorenz." Duncan tipped his head from side to side as his eyes scanned the report. "Sixteen going on 40. Runaway. One citation for loitering, arrested for solicitation and released on her own recognizance. Last seen in the company of one Don Chilton, known felon, in the lounge of the Starlite Inn."

"Think that's our perp?" Carnegie, jelly doughnut in one hammy fist, coffee cup in the other, could have posed for the cover of *Stereotypes Monthly*.

It was a wryly amusing thought, and Gabe tried to evoke the imaginary magazine cover. Cover. Yeah, that's exactly what he was doing – trying to cover what was really going on upstairs with trivial mental pursuits. He deleted the non-sequitur he'd just entered into his own report and tried to focus, but his mind kept coming back to – "She was your daughter's age wasn't she, Reg?"

Duncan's wild Scottish brows formed a hedgerow over his nose. "So what?"

Gabe stared at the orderly spray of pixels on his mon-

itor. Amy Lorenz, once living, breathing human being, now neat blot on police blotter. "I just thought... If I had a daughter that age, it'd hit a little close to home."

"Fuck that shit," said Duncan. "My daughter got nothing in common with that little whore but gender. You think they got pimps at Lutheran high schools, Gabby? I knew you Catholics were liberal, but –"

"OK! OK! Sorry I said anything." Gabe raised his hands in surrender. (No, no. Can't happen here. Not my daughter. She's different, different, DIFFERENT.)

"Holy Christ – 'close to home!'" Duncan flopped the report onto his desk and headed for the coffee maker, still snarling.

Carnegie finished his doughnut. "I'll put out an APB on this guy Chilton. We got anything else?"

At the coffee maker, Duncan said, "Uh, yeah. Murder weapon was a blade of unspecified type. Not all that sharp."

Gabe shivered. All that blood. Jesus, why'd shit like this have to happen? If I were God– No, he wouldn't presume to play that scenario. If I were Emperor of the Cosmos, no 16-year-old girls (or boys), whores or otherwise, would die bloodily behind motel dumpsters. Hell, no 16-year-old would be a whore in the first place – at least, not on my beat.

His eyes, smarting a little from the glare of the screen, moved to the window. Fog pressed against the panes, phantom nose to glass. He shook off the feeling of being watched by it and sighed. It would probably rain tonight and by tomorrow the last traces of Amy Lorenz would be gone, blood, gore and white chalk outline.

"You done with that report, kid?" Carnegie was at his side.

"Uh, yeah. Just about."

A hand fell on his shoulder, neither gently nor harshly. "Don't take it so hard, Gabe. You can't cry crocodile tears over every runaway who ends up in a pool of her own blood. You'll drown."

"Yeah. I know. I'll handle it."

Carnegie patted his shoulder, then joined Duncan at the coffee machine.

Handle it, Gabe thought, typing a series of meaningless words. Handle it, how?

Noon. He was exhausted already. Eight arrests before lunch. It had to be some kind of record. Of the eight, only one perp had been old enough to vote. None of them should have been where they were, doing what they were doing. They should have been in school, at jobs, in therapy.

Crime, he understood. Violence, he understood. But how in the name of God did a 13-year-old amass the greed or lust or sheer stupid rage necessary to rob or rape or kill another human being? What kind of world gave a kid that age that much rage?

At 2:00 p.m. he got called to respond to a domestic violence complaint on Dolores – the heart of his beat. He was two blocks away; it seemed to take forever to get there. Yesterday's weird electrical storm had left in its wake a peculiar steamy fog that cut visibility to nil. On the sidewalks, people who were obviously slaves to the idea that fog is cold carried their useless coats over their arms and squinted perplexedly at their moist, warm, woolly surroundings. Squinted because, while it was thick, the fog seemed alive with light, as if each minute droplet held a bit of muted, silvered sunlight.

Driving through the stuff, Gabe registered movement only through the way his on-call lights bounced back from the fog's near-opaque billows, careering over the chrome handlebars and polished fuselage of his motorcycle in a bizarre kaleidoscope. Normally, he marked such things and savoured them; now he merely noted them the way Duncan noted that a victim had a handful of the perp's hair clutched in her hand.

The domestic violence complaint arose from a sepia-tone Victorian that was neither posh nor seedy. Gliding to a stop before it, alone, Gabe wondered if he should go in or wait for backup. The decision was taken out of his hands by a tiny Chinese woman who came flying down the front steps toward him, hands outstretched as if she would rip him from his bike if he didn't dismount quickly enough.

He hopped off and removed his helmet, releasing the dispatcher's continuous chatter into the mist. It was sucked up immediately, replaced by the frantic yammering of the petite woman, who now had possession of his sleeve.

"He kill them! He kill them!" she shrilled. "You hurry, officer! Please, please! He kill them!"

"Who ma'am?" He had on his cop face – essence of calm. Soothe the witness. Get coherent information.

The woman turned her head and pointed at the second floor of the building. "Mr Mattias. He come for daughter mad as hell. They divorce and he want little girl. She say he stone – stay away from little girl. She say he bad father – no kind of father at all. She take him to court. He say she bad mom; court give him little girl." Her face dissolved into a fabric of anguish. "Then she say little girl not his. That's when he go all crazy. Get knife – throw me out. I call 911. Please, officer, she scream so bad. You go up now." She tugged at his sleeve again.

He heard it now – the high-pitched sound of terror – a continuous thread of fear and pain. He glanced up the street as if he might divine on-coming squad cars and ambulances. His motorcycle sat silent, continuing to spatter the house, the street, the fog, the faces of the Chinese woman and the gathering crowd with unnat-

ural, frantic colour.

He pulled out his gun and entered the house, feeling as if he moved in slo-mo, expecting to wake up in bed next to Marica any second. He did not wake. He made his way, fully conscious, to the second floor, tracing the horrible wailing, wanting it to stop, praying it would continue. The front door of the flat was dead-bolted. He kicked it, then shot the lock off. How many times had he done that? Just like the movies.

The door gave under his foot this time, falling away into a living room. A nice, big living room with cheap but stylish furniture, hand-loomed rugs, hundreds of bright pillows, a rocking horse. Wooden. Painted to look like a carousel pony.

He tracked the sound down a narrow hallway, hardwood floors creaking under his feet. A knife, the witness had said. The husband had a knife. That didn't mean he didn't also have a gun.

At the end of the hall, a bedroom door was half-open. Gabe got a glimpse of more carousel horses – a wall full. Eerie silvery light reflected in a vanity mirror. And also in the mirror–

His heart pitched painfully in his chest. On the bed, sunk into a cheerful comforter, a man lay face to the pillows, his butt riding up and down. Carousel horse. He grunted with each downward lurch, punctuating the continuing wail with guttural counter-rhythm. Protruding from beneath him, all but lost between denim and patchwork, a little girl's leg performed a jerky dance. On the foot, a lace sock. Marica'd just bought a pair like that for Cara.

Gabe found his voice. "POLICE!" It was not a terrifying bellow – not the way Duncan or Carnegie would've done it – but a horrified shriek. He kicked the door simultaneously, slamming it against the wall with a sound like a shotgun blast.

The rapist scrambled to his knees, twisting, struggling for balance. The knife appeared as if drawn from the air, blade glinting in the silvery light from the windows. He was a young man – Gabe's age, younger – dark, curly hair, pale face a twisted medley of rage and fear and something unnameable. He fumbled the fly of his pants closed, his dick flopping like a purplish, fat tongue, and raised his knife hand, lurching on the unsteady surface of the bed.

"Freeze!" Gabe shrieked. His gun, in both hands, shook. He knew his own face was an echo of that one, and he knew that, for him, the unnameable thing was hatred.

And the little girl sobbed: "Daddy!"

The man on the bed flinched, his eyes going to the girl, his knife hand twitching. The shot from Gabe's gun blew him against the wall. He slid to the floor through a field of carousel horses, disappearing behind the bed. A swathe of his own blood traced his descent.

All the way to hell, Gabe thought. He didn't go to him, didn't check him for vitals, only looked at him long enough to determine that he would stay where he was. He moved to the sobbing child. Tried to comfort her without seeing her. Tried to check her for injuries without seeing the worst wound. She covered it, pulling into a fetal position. Her teeth chattered. He wanted to cover her, to wrap the comforter around her, but didn't dare do anything to disturb the physical evidence.

He heard footsteps on the stairs outside the flat, the sound of a gurney unfolding. "Back here!" he yelled and started to rise.

The child's hands clutched at him. "Mommy! He hurt Mommy!"

He remembered, then, that there was another life involved here. "I'll find her," he said. He paused only long enough to cuff the rapist – the father, he reminded himself – and kick the knife across the room. He didn't bother to feel for a pulse.

The gurney was in the hallway. He squeezed past it on his way to search the other rooms. "The little girl first," he told the paramedics.

The mother was in the other bedroom in a canopied bed that was something from a gothic romance. All he could see of her on entry was the lower half of her body – naked, legs spread, jerking a little as if she lay beneath an invisible lover. Gabe prepared himself – made sure his cop face was set. Another stride brought the rest of her into view and he knew he could never be prepared.

She was just alive. Breath bubbled red between lips – her own and the new ones her husband had cut in her throat. Her body quivered, her eyes blinked rapidly. Shock.

Gabe opened his mouth to call the paramedics, heard a snort of laughter behind him from the doorway.

"Jesus! What's she on? She screwing the invisible man, or what?"

Gabe whirled. Gunderson. Rookie. "Fuck you! She's dying. Get the –" He shoved passed the startled boy, wanting to do more than shove. "Paramedics! Here! *Here!*"

Later, he called Marica at work just to hear the sound of her voice. Just to prove to himself that her life did not intersect with that other woman's. Then, he called the school to make certain Cara was safely in class. Even so, he discovered that if he didn't keep his eyes wide open, he'd see Cara trampled to death by carousel horses and Marica screwing Death in a canopied bed. Worst of all was the filth on the walls of his mind. He wanted to visit the perp in his security hospital room (yes, the lucky little girl still had a daddy) and castrate him. Then, he'd beat the crap out of Gunderson and feel purged. Maybe.

He sat at his desk, looking out at the wall of sheeny fog and thought, God in Heaven, if only it could stop. Not everywhere. That would be asking too much. But on my beat. Just on my beat. No more gangs fighting over turf they can only keep six feet of; no more women trading sex for money, drugs and abuse; no more kids packing their heads full of powdered death; no more vengeful egomaniacs, whose universe ends at the tip of an erect penis. No more.

White light rippled through the gossamer mass beyond the window. A giant's flashbulb. God taking snapshots. Gabe blinked. Later than he thought. Street lights must've come on.

He checked out and went home, knowing he'd been wrong. Marica's and Cara's lives did intersect those victims'. And he was the crossroads.

His first day back out on the street, Gabe felt like a slow-healing bruise. When the first call came, it made his heart pound and his throat tighten. There was an altercation in progress at a bar in China Basin, the

heart of his new beat.

Clearly, he could not lie low, but he answered the call with a dread that threatened to crawl out of the pit of his stomach and choke him. From outside the bar, a gaudy hole-in-the-wall called Jonesy's, he could hear the telltale sounds of a minor war – voices shrilled and bludgeoned, glassware shattered. He steeled himself and stepped into the place.

He thought for an instant that he'd wandered into a Halloween party. Black enamelled chairs with bright orange pads sat, legs up, on black and orange table tops; a bucket and mop sat in the middle of a floor covered in alternating squares of stained orange, black and white.

The battle was taking place at the rear of the room. A man stood among the tables, yelling like a berserker as he methodically pulled shot glasses out of a dishwasher tray and hurled them at the bar, behind which his adversary was besieged. The mirror behind the bar was shattered, bottles of liquor drooled their contents onto the shelving, a neon Budweiser sign hung at a crazy angle by its cord, sputtering indignantly in white and red. Broken glass was everywhere. At intervals, an arm would whip out from below the lip of the bar to return fire with more glassware and grapeshot invective.

It was almost comical and Gabe felt a bubble of laughter lift itself out of the morass in his stomach. He assessed the situation for a moment longer, trying to get the gist of the argument. No luck. It had degenerated into name-calling.

Gabe flipped the cover off the holster of his service revolver and set his hand on the grip. "Police!"

It came out sounding tougher than Gabe felt and it put a sudden stop to the barrage of flying glass. For a moment the room held its breath; a last bottle teetered uncertainly on the shelf behind the bar before toppling with a sodden smash. Gabe could hear the sound of profits dripping away onto the garish floor.

"Oh, geez," said the guy behind the bar. "Geez, officer, I –"

"Hands up. Stand slowly. Turn to face me." Gabe drew his revolver. His hand was deceptively steady. He tried to look relaxed and easy-going despite the weaponry. Fear called him a liar and curdled his stomach in rebellion.

The two men stood, hands raised, eyes blinking, faces blank and sweating.

Gabe looked them over, then cleared his throat and asked the guy behind the bar, "Are you the owner?"

A slow nod answered. The bartender's eyes did not leave the muzzle of Gabe's gun. So far so good.

"Can you tell me what this is all about?"

There was no answer to that, merely a furtive exchange of glances.

"What started this?"

The owner's mouth worked, his brow furrowed and unfurrowed. "Well, look at him," he said, jerking his head at his adversary.

Gabe took a quick inventory. About 5' 10", 185 pounds, dishevelled blonde hair, wild grey eyes, stained tan pants, sweat-soaked Dodgers t-shirt, once-white Nikes. All in all, a sorry sight.

Gabe shrugged and the bar-owner mumbled something he couldn't quite hear. "What? I didn't catch that."

"He's a *Dodgers* fan."

Gabe almost laughed. He beckoned the owner with his free hand. "Come out from behind the bar."

Obedience was immediate. Once he had ascertained that neither man was armed, Gabe holstered his revolver. "That's what started this fight?" he asked. "This guy's a *Dodgers* fan?"

The owner's eyes made a circuit of the bar. Following them, Gabe's mind made sudden sense of the colour scheme. Only now did he notice the posters of Giants greats, the Giants logo etched into the ruined mirror behind the bar and echoed in a stained glass window on the opposite wall, the portrait of Christie Mathieson in a place of honour over the cash register.

"He tried to throw me out," said the *Dodger* fan almost petulantly. "I been coming in here for ten years and he tries to throw me out."

"Yeah, well, you never came in here looking like *that* before."

"You knew I was a *Dodger* fan all these years. *You tore my shirt!*"

"Yeah, well, you wore it in here!"

"There's a pennant race going on, for godsake!"

"Exactly."

Gabe raised his hands. "Whoa, whoa! You guys know each other, I take it."

"We *were* best friends," said the bar owner.

Gabe exhaled what was left of the pent-up fear and tension he'd been hanging on to. "What're your names?"

"Rick Jones," said the bar-owner, "but everybody calls me Jonesy."

"Tony Barth," said Jonesy's ex-best friend.

"Okay, Tony. Jonesy. Let's go back to the beginning – see if we can sort this out."

Quiet. It had been another quiet week; and now, on Friday morning, Gabe realized he'd actually been looking forward to coming to work. He took a deep breath of briny air and watched the fog scoot across the yard, dragging its chill veils among the parked squad cars, draping them about cars and men alike, contrasting colours reduced to soft-focus gradations of grey.

Wedding veils, Gabe thought. That's what it reminded him of – Marica's wedding veils, and that reminded him almost tangibly of their honeymoon in New Orleans, of Mardi Gras, or bright noise and vivid people. That made him feel good – made him realize that he felt good. He savoured that.

He savoured the walk from the yard to the station, too. Each click-crunch of shoes on concrete, each breath of tangy, iced air. It gave him time to reflect that only weeks ago he believed he'd never feel like this again, never be able to look at San Francisco and love it the way he had when he'd first transferred from Manhattan.

Only weeks ago he'd felt like he was riding the crest of a wave. The Mattias rape/murder. God, he'd almost put it out of his mind – almost, but not quite. It still haunted him, lingering like the bitter smell of mothballs in a dark, disused closet. It would continue to haunt him until the trial was over and Ron Mattias was in a prison cell. The cell would not be on death row; even Gabe doubted the DA could make Murder One out of what was probably a crime of passion. And perversion.

Unpremeditated murder. Did lack of planning make

it any less heinous? Over and over Gabe had felt himself hoping the rape charges would provide special enough circumstances to put Ron Mattias away for a significant portion of his life. He had to think of them that way – the rape charges. He couldn't think of a little girl and her mother in that context. Not yet, anyway. But during the trial, during his testimony, he would remember them the way he'd found them; and what he saw he would make the jury see as well. Then maybe it would cease to haunt him – the violence, the agony too close to home, the murderous, animal rage that rose in him when he remembered. That was the grimmest ghost of all.

The warmth of the police station enveloped him and he switched the lights back on in his head. Funny though, that call had been like the peak of a storm. Since then the most heinous crime he'd cited anyone for was disturbing the peace. He'd made no actual arrests. It was as if every criminal on Gabriel Sanchez's beat had decided to take a vacation.

He grinned. Night after night he'd come home and Marica'd take one look at his face and know it was safe to ask, "How was your day, honey?" And he'd say, "Pretty quiet." Which was not to say dull. More often than not, he came home with at least one amusing tale to tell. Tonight she'd ask and he'd tell her it was boring and laugh when her lovely face registered her disbelief... again.

No, quiet wasn't boring. Even without violent crime, there was plenty to do. He decided that Marica and Cara deserved a night out on the town. Dinner and a movie. There weren't many family films playing at the moment, but one was all he needed.

He was in the locker room when Carnegie came looking for him and told him the division Chief wanted to see him. He went upstairs, carrying the normal human anxiety engendered by such a situation, though he knew he hadn't done anything wrong. He chuckled. Why did the human mind always assume being called to visit a superior was an occasion for panic? He could just as easily be handed a commendation as a reprimand.

The first thing that Gabe noticed upon entering Chief Prudholme's office was that his service record was displayed on the computer that occupied the return of the desk. OK. Something he had done, then. The Chief's face was uncommunicative as hell as he continued to study the computer screen, leaving Gabe hanging in the wind. After about a minute of this, Gabe heaved a deep and sonorous sigh.

The Chief looked up at him. "Know why you're here, Officer?"

"No, sir. Not a clue. Unless it has something to do with my court date," he added on a sudden kick of inspiration.

The Chief's brows ascended. "I suppose it might at that – indirectly, at any rate. Sit down, Sanchez."

Gabe sat, wishing the Chief would hurry up and come to the point.

"The Mattias murder was... a pretty jarring experience, wasn't it?"

Gabe nodded. "Yes sir, it was."

"You've been seeing Dr Chowdry for counselling?"

"Yes sir. My last appointment was Thursday."

"She gave you a clean bill of health, then? You feel everything is resolved?"

"Should be in my record there, sir," Gabe said, want-

ing the Chief to know he could tell when he was being psyched. "Everything is as resolved as it can be, I guess. I don't have nightmares any more... Look, sir, have I done something wrong?"

Prudholme snorted delicately. "Wrong? I don't know, Officer. What I do know is that since the Mattias murder, you have made absolutely zero arrests."

The Chief couldn't have surprised him any more if he'd stood on his head and whistled "Dixie." He hoped the minutes it took for him to reorganize his thoughts only felt like minutes. "I... I wasn't aware there was a quota, sir." He sounded facetious, but hadn't meant to.

"There isn't a quota. But you have to admit, it's pretty unusual for a cop on a beat like yours to go for the better part of two months without performing a single arrest."

"It's been an unusual two months," Gabe said, willing the tightness in his chest to dissipate.

"In what way?"

Gabe shrugged. "Quiet. Really quiet. I haven't made any arrests because there haven't been any to make. It's just been... incredibly quiet on my beat."

Prudholme looked sceptical. "No one else has complained of this."

Gabe smiled. "Who's complaining?" He caught the look on the Chief's face and cleared his throat and the smile at the same time. "Check with the dispatcher. There just haven't been a lot of calls."

"I did check with the dispatcher. Her files indicated that you did have a drop in calls. Still, that none of the calls you did get resulted in arrests..."

"There were really no arrests to be made, sir."

Chief Prudholme shot him a look expressive of grave doubt, grabbed his mouse where it lay unresisting on its red pad and made a clicking assault on something on the screen. The image changed – Gabe wished he could see to what. Not that it would have helped. All it would really do was soothe a natural human fear of the unknown.

"At 10:00 am last Thursday you were called to a disturbance on Market. Shots were fired."

Gabe shook his head. "No shots. Turned out to be a bunch of kids with firecrackers. Between the ages of nine and twelve. I let them off with a warning and talked to their parents. The only culprit was the 14-year-old who traded them the fireworks for some comic books." He smiled. "*Spiderman*. Someday those kids'll realize those magazines were worth more than a truck load of firecrackers."

Prudholme was frowning at him. "Burglary in progress. 8:00 p.m., Friday, 21st Street."

"Turned out to be some poor guy who'd left his keys in his desk drawer at work. He didn't realize it until he'd left the BART station and was halfway home. He got home, found the lights out – his wife was sick and had turned in early. So he tried going over his back fence and up a trellis into a downstairs window. His wife woke up and called 911. By the time I got there, they were already having a good laugh over a cup of herb tea."

The Chief pulled up three more calls. Gabe went through them one by one. One was almost as funny as Mr Aurelio's missing keys. Two were simple misunderstandings. Talking about them, reflecting on them,

Gabe couldn't help but recall the feeling of almost giddy relief that came with the realization that he was not going to have to confiscate weapons, impound drugs or put somebody's kid in a body bag. It was what a policeman's job should be – solving problems, smoothing communications, soothing tempers, not picking up the bloody pieces after somebody's life exploded.

"Look, Chief," he said after reciting the story of how he'd stopped the major league battle at Jonesy's. "You obviously think I... I don't know... that I mishandled these situations. I don't think I did."

"Might you have been overly cautious?"

"I don't think so. I suppose I could've arrested Tony Barth and fined Jonesy, but the only damage done was to the bar. And Jonesy was willing to forgive that once his buddy offered to cover half the repairs... and promise never to wear Dodger blue into the place again." He failed to suppress a smile. "Honestly, Chief, I can't think of any way I could've handled any one of those calls any more... professionally. I mean, I didn't have to arrest anybody. Isn't that good?"

Chief Prudholme didn't answer that rhetorical question and later Gabe had to wonder what it really meant to be a cop. What was the purpose – to arrest people, or to intervene before they *needed* to be arrested? "Peace Officers" – wasn't that what they were? His beat certainly seemed to be peaceful. That was good – wasn't it?

On patrol that day Gabe's mind kept returning to Prudholme, to the glowing computer monitor parading little bits and pieces of his life and service for critical inspection. He thought back to the Mattias murder, to the roar of dark emotion it raised. And that called upon him a moment of honesty: Had he been avoiding volatile situations? Or was he seeing situations as more benign than they were because he couldn't stand the darkness – feared being overwhelmed by it?

Sitting on his kerbed bike, staring at the garish orange and black facade of Jonesy's bar, he dug deep, reaching for his fears, willing them out into the brilliant light of a San Francisco day. No, he decided, he was not doing those things, because no matter how strong was his desire to be a Peace Officer and not a Violence and Corruption and Picking Up After Death Officer, he could not possibly control the actions of others. It was a fluke. A good one, regardless of what Chief Prudholme had implied.

Those thoughts were solace when two days later, Gabriel Sanchez found himself under investigation by Internal Affairs.

Gabe glanced over his paperwork and shook his head. Reassigned again – second time in eight months. They'd given him a senior partner again this time, too. Not that it'd helped much last time. His previous partner, Sy Pendergast, had also been reprimanded, scheduled for counselling and reassigned.

Gabe had felt guilty about that at first, but as soon as Sy was out on his new beat, he made just as many arrests as he had before being paired with Gabriel Sanchez. Only Gabe's beat (and ex-beats) seemed cursed by the "law and order fairy." Peace reigned wherever he went and stayed when he left, as if out of habit. He felt a little sorry for the cops who followed in his footsteps. But only a little.

His once flawless record didn't look so good any more – no arrests, several reprimands, on-again off-again counselling – but he didn't feel too sorry for himself either. Internal affairs could prove no wrong-doing, his counsellor had found no sign of burnout or other stress-related problems. Gabe Sanchez was simply a funny kind of jinx. A law-and-order jinx. He carried a plague of peace.

He didn't understand what had happened to him or why, but he did understand that it was good, no matter what it did to his career. His family thought it was good. It made them happier, more tranquil. Father Dias thought it was good. He called it a blessing. Once he went so far as to call it a miracle. If Gabe got relieved of duty, then he'd just have to hope the jinx or blessing or whatever it was would hold. It would mean a nomadic life for Cara and Marica – a year in this neighbourhood, a year in that – but they'd already assured him they wouldn't mind.

"Daddy's magic!" Cara had said. "Maybe the Pope'll call him up and saint him!"

He felt magic sometimes. Sometimes he just felt blessed.

Gabe folded his transfer papers and stuffed them into his pocket. One neighbourhood at a time. That was the only way a lone plague carrier could infect an entire city. One neighbourhood at a time.

Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff lives in Grass Valley, California, and has contributed stories to *Analog*, *Amazing* and other publications. She is the author of four fantasy novels, the most recent of which is *The Spirit Gate* (Baen Books, 1997). Her first story for *Interzone* was "Doctor Dodge" (issue 125).

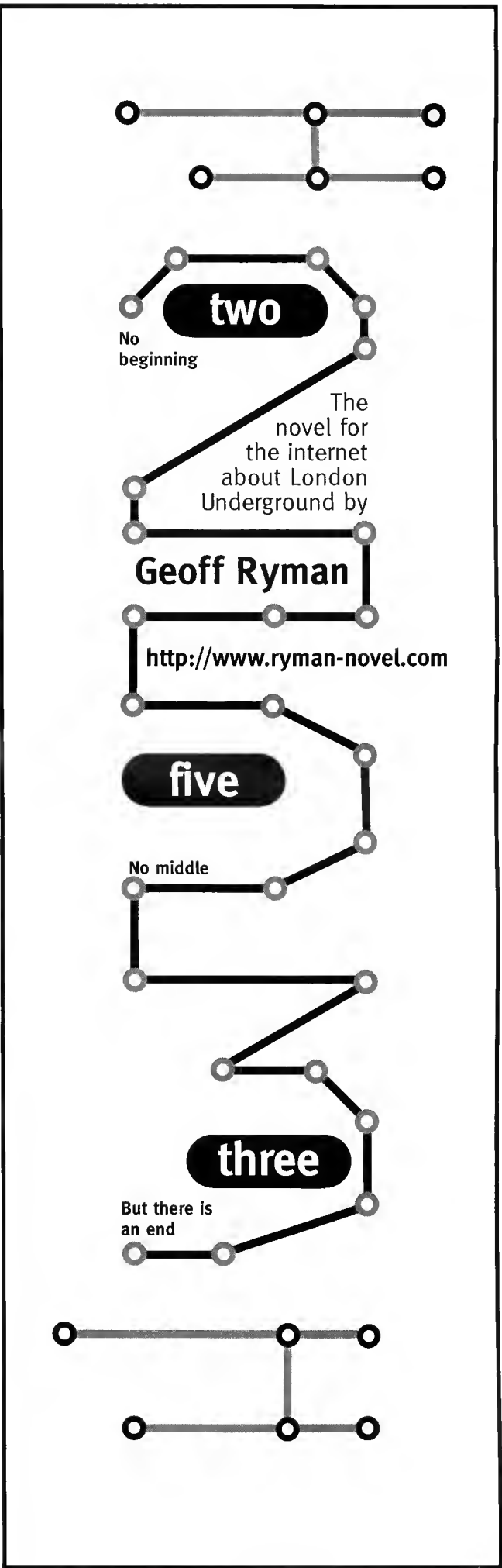


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The Twelfth Album

Stephen Baxter

In the bowels of a ship that would never sail again – mourning our friend Sick Note – Lightoller and I sat cross-legged on the carpet of a disused Turkish Bath, and listened to John Lennon.

“Fooking hell,” said Lightoller. “That’s ‘Give Me Some Truth’. It was on the *Imagine* album. But –”

“But what?”

Lightoller, he says now, knew there was something different about the cut from the first chord. It might even be true. That’s Lightoller for you.

“Typical Lennon,” he said moodily. “He goes whole bars on a single note, a single fooking chord. Manoeuvring around the harmonies like a crab. But –”

“But *what?*”

“Where’s the fooking echo? Lennon solo always drowned his vocals. This is clean and hoarse. Sounds more like a George Martin production.”

Not very interested, I was staring at the ceiling. Gilded beams in crimson.

We never knew how Sick Note had managed to blag himself quarters on the ship itself, let alone the Turkish Bath.

It was a whole set of rooms, with a mosaic floor, blue-green tiled walls, stanchions enclosed in carved teak. Queen Victoria’s nightmare if she’d been goosed by Rudolph Valentino. As Lightoller said, Sick Note must have been the best fooking porter in this whole floating fooking hotel.

“Of course,” Lightoller was saying, “it’s plausible they’d have used this. Lennon offered it as a Beatles song during the *Let It Be* sessions in Feb ’69. It was the way they worked. They were trying out songs that finished up on *Let It Be* and *Abbey Road*, even their solo albums, as far back as early 1968 –”

“Who would have used the song for *what?*”

“The Beatles. On their next album. The twelfth.”

Compared to Lightoller, and Sick Note, I’m a diletante. But I’m enough of a Fabs fan to spot the problem with that.

I said, “The Beatles released eleven LPs, from *Please Please Me* through *Let It Be*.”

“You’re counting UK releases,” said Lightoller.

“Of course.”

“And you don’t include, for instance, the *Yellow Submarine* album which was mostly a George Martin

movie score, or the *Magical Mystery Tour* album they released in the US, or the EPs –”

“Of course not. So there was no twelfth Beatle album.”

“Not in this fooking world,” said Lightoller mysteriously. John sang on, raw and powerful.

Oddly enough, Lightoller and I had been talking about other worlds even before we found the album, in Sick Note’s abandoned quarters, deep inside the old ship.

You have to picture the scene.

I suppose you’d call it a wake: twenty, thirty blokes of indeterminate age standing around in the Cafe Parisien on B Deck – loaned by the floating hotel’s owners for the occasion, all tumbling trellises and ivy pots and wicker chairs – drinking beer and wine we’d brought ourselves, and looking unsuccessfully for tortilla chips.

“Morgan Robertson,” Lightoller had said around a mouthful of Monster Munches.

“Who?”

“Novelist. 1890s. Writes about a fooking big Atlantic liner, bigger than anything built before. Loads it with rich and complacent people, and wrecks it one cold April night on an iceberg. Called his ship the *Titan* –”

“Spooky,” I said dryly.

“In another world –”

“Yeah.”

Lightoller is full of crap like that, and not shy about sharing it.

But I welcomed Lightoller’s bullshit, for once; we were, after all, just distracting ourselves from the fact that Sick Note was gone. What else are words for, at a time like that?

Bored, morbid, a little drunk, we had wandered off, through the ship, in search of Sick Note.

We had come through the foyer on A Deck, with its huge glass dome, the oak panelling, the balustrades with their wrought-iron scroll work, the gigantic wall clock with its two bronze nymphs. All faded and much scarred by restoration, of course. Like the ship. Like the city outside which we could glimpse through the windows: the shops and maritime museums of Albert Dock to which the ship was forevermore bolted, and the Liverpool waterfront beyond, all of it under a suitably grey sky.

I said something about it being as if they'd towed the Adelphi Hotel into Liverpool Bay. Lightoller made a ribald remark about Sick Note and the nymphs.

We had walked on, down the grand stairway from the boat deck, along the corridor where the valets and maids of the first-class passengers used to stay, past the second-class library and the third-class lounge, down the broad stairs towards steerage.

The second track was, of all things, "It Don't Come Easy."

"Ringo," I said.

"Yeah. Solo single in April '71."

I strained to listen. I couldn't tell if it was different. Was the production a little sharper?

"Every Night," the next track, was Paul: just McCartney being McCartney, pretty much as he recorded it on his first solo album.

"Sentimental pap," I said.

Lightoller frowned. "Listen to it. The way he manages the shift from minor to major –"

"Oldest trick in the book."

"McCartney could make the sun come out, just by his fooking chromatic structure."

"I'll take your word for it."

"And it's another track they tried out for *Let It Be*. And –"

"What?"

"I think there are extra lyrics."

"Extra?"

The next track was quiet: Harrison's "All Things Must Pass."

Lightoller said sourly, "Another *Let It Be* demo. But they were still keeping George in his place. First track he's had."

The playing was simple and exquisite, little more than solo voice with acoustic guitar, closer to the demo George had made of the song in his Beatle days than his finished solo album version.

I didn't recognize the next song, a Lennon track. But it got Lightoller jumping up and down.

"It's 'Child of Nature,'" he kept saying. "Fooking hell. They tried it out for the White Album. But Lennon held it back and released it on *Imagine* after the split –"

Now I recognized it. It was "Jealous Guy." With different lyrics.

"Fooking hell," said Lightoller. This has appeared nowhere, not even on a bootleg. And besides, this is no demo. It's a finished fooking production. *Listen* to it."

That's Lightoller for you. Excitable.

We had reached the alleyway on E Deck that Sick Note had always called Scottie Road. You could tell this was meant for steerage and crew: no carpet, low ceilings, naked light bulbs, plain white walls.

We worked our way towards the bow, where Sick Note had lived the last years of his life.

"Sick Note would never go down to the engine rooms," Lightoller reminisced.

"Reciprocating engines," I said, imitating Sick Note. "A revolutionary low-pressure turbine. Twenty-nine boilers."

"Yeah. All nailed down and painted in primary colours to show the kiddies how a steam ship used to

work. Not that they care."

"No," I said. "But Sick Note did. He said it was humiliating to gut a working boat like that."

"That was Sick Note."

Away from Scottie Road the ship was a labyrinth of rooms and corridors and ducts.

"I never could figure out my way around here," I said.

Lightoller laughed. "Even Sick Note used to get lost. Especially after he'd had a few with the boys up in the Smoking Room. Do you remember that time he swore –"

"He found a rip in the hull?"

"Yeah. In a post room somewhere below. A rip, as if the boat had collided with something. And he looked out –"

Sick Note had found Liverpool flattened. Like the Blitz but worse, he said. Mounds of rubble. Like the surface of the Moon.

"... And he saw a sky glowing full of shooting stars," Lightoller said.

It was one of Sick Note's favourite drunken anecdotes.

"Of course," said Lightoller, "this old scow probably wouldn't have survived any sort of collision. The hull plates are made of brittle steel. And it was just too fooking big; it would have shaken itself to pieces as soon as a few rivets were popped –"

Lightoller can be an anorak sometimes. But he used to be an engineer, like me.

Correction. He is an engineer, like me.

At last, on F Deck, we found the Turkish Bath.

Sick Note had made this place his own: a few sticks of furniture, the walls lined with books, posters from rock concerts and Hammer horror movies and long-forgotten 1960s avant garde book stores plastered over the crimson ceiling. I found what looked like a complete run of the *International Times*. There was even a kitchen of sorts, equipped with antiques: a Hoover Keymatic washing machine and a Philco Marketer fridge-freezer and a General Electric cooker. Sick Note always did have an uncanny supply of artefacts from the 70s, or late 60s anyhow, in miraculously good condition, that the rest of us used to envy. But he'd never reveal his source.

And there were records here too: vinyl LPs, not CDs (of course), leaning up against each other all the way around the edge of the floor like toppling dominoes; the stack even curved a little to get around the corners. The odd thing was, if you looked all the way around the room, you couldn't see how they were being supported – or rather, they were all supporting each other. It was a record stack designed by Escher.

Lightoller bent to look at the albums. "Alphabetized."

"Of course." That was Sick Note.

"Let's find the Beatles. B for Beatles..." He grunted, sounding a little surprised. He pulled out an album with a jet-black sleeve. "Look at this fooking thing." He handed it to me.

The cover was elementally simple: just a black field, with a single word rendered in a white typewriter font in the lower left-hand corner.

God.

Just that, the word, and a full stop.

Nothing else. No image. Not even an artist name on the cover. Nothing on the spine or the back of the

sleeve; no artist photos or track listings, or even a copyright mark or acknowledgement paragraph.

The record slid into my hand inside a plain black paper inner sleeve. And when I tried to pull out the record itself – reaching inside to rest my fingers on the centre label – the sleeve static-clung to the vinyl, as if unwilling to let it go.

The vinyl was standard-issue oil black. The label was just the famous Apple logo – skin-side up on what was presumably Side One, the crisp white inner flesh on Side Two. Still no track listing – in fact, not even a title.

I held the album by its rim. I turned it this way and that; the tracks shone in the light.

Sometimes I forget how tactile the experience of owning an album used to be.

“Look at that fooking thing,” breathed Lightoller. “A couple of scratches at the rim. Otherwise perfect.”

“Yeah.” An album that had been played, but cared for. That was Sick Note for you.

We exchanged glances.

Lightoller lifted up the glass cover of Sick Note’s deck, and I lifted on the album, settling it over the spindle delicately. Lightoller powered up the deck. It was a Quad stack Sick Note had been working on piece by piece since 1983. No CD player, of course.

When the needle touched the vinyl there was a moment of sharp crackle, then hissing expectancy.

The music came crashing out.

And that was how we found ourselves listening to a puzzlingly different John Lennon.

Side One’s last track was the big song McCartney used to close *Ram*: “Back Seat of My Car.”

“Another song they tried for *Let It Be*,” Lightoller said. “And –”

“Shut up a minute,” I said.

“...What?”

“Listen to that.”

In place of the multi-track of his own and Linda’s voices that McCartney had plastered over his solo version, the song was laced with exquisite three-part harmonies.

Beatle harmonies.

“Lightoller,” I said. “I’m starting to feel scared.”

Lightoller let the stylus run off, reverently.

I got up from the carpeted floor and walked around the room. There were framed photos and news clippings here, showing scenes from the ship’s long history.

I couldn’t mistake the pounding piano and drum beat that started Side Two.

“Instant Karma,” I said.

“A single for Lennon in February 1970.”

“In our world.”

“Great fooking opener.”

Then came a Harrison song, a wistful, slight thing called “Isn’t It A Pity.”

Lightoller nodded. “Another one they tried out in early 1969, but never used. It finished up on George’s first solo album –”

The next track was “Junk,” a short instrumental McCartney wrote when they were staying with the Maharishi in India. It sounded like the theme of a TV show about vets. But it was sweet and sad.

We just listened for a while.

With the gentle guitars playing, it was as if Sick Note was still there, in this cloud of possessions, the very air probably still full of a dusty haze of him.

...Here was the ship in dry dock in Belfast after her maiden voyage, with that famous big near-miss scar down her starboard flank. Here she was as a troop carrier in 1915, painted with gaudy geometric shapes that were supposed to fool German submarines. Here was a clipping about how she’d evaded a U-boat torpedo, and how she’d come about and rammed the damn thing.

“Old Reliable,” I said. “That was what Sick Note used to call her. The nickname given her by the troops she transported.”

“He loved this old tub, in his way,” said Lightoller.

“And he did love his Fabs.”

That was Sick Note for you.

The fourth track was “Wah Wah,” another Harrison song, a glittering, heavy-handed rocker with crystal-sharp three-part harmony.

Lightoller nodded. “Harrison wrote this when he stormed out during the *Let It Be* sessions. He kept it back for his solo album –”

“In our world.”

“Yeah. I guess he brought it back to the group, in the God world...” Lightoller was sounding morbid. “But there was no fooking twelfth album, was there? This must be a fake. Or an import, or a compilation, or a bootleg. Once Allan Klein and Yoko got involved they were all too busy suing each other’s fooking arses off.”

I picked up the album sleeve. For a possession of Sick Note’s, it was a surprisingly grubby. Specked with some kind of ash. I felt obscurely disturbed by Lightoller’s loss of faith in his own bullshit. “But all the Allan Klein stuff started in the spring of ‘69. Even after all that, they made another album together.”

“*Abbey Road*,” Lightoller nodded, and I thought the spark was back in his eyes. “Yeah. They might have hung around for one more try. But something would have had to be different.”

I kept roaming the room.

More clippings, of how White Star had merged with Cunard in 1934, and the old ship lost out to newer, faster, safer ships. She was almost sold for scrap – but then was put to work as a cargo scow in the southern Atlantic – and then, after Michael Heseltine parachuted into Merseyside after the 1981 riots, she was bought up and bolted to the dock, here at Liverpool, and refitted as a hotel, the centre of what Heseltine hoped would become the regeneration of the city. Fat chance.

“So,” I said, “your theory is that this album comes from an alternate world where somebody shot Allen Klein.”

Lightoller shrugged. “It might have been something bigger.”

“Like what?”

“I don’t know. Like nuclear fooking war.”

“Nuclear war?”

“Sure. If the world was going to fooking hell, it would have touched everybody’s lives, even before the Big One dropped. For the Beatles, it just kept them in the studio together a while longer.”

“Their contribution to world peace,” I said sourly.

“They used to think like that,” he said defensively.

“What was that story of Sick Note’s? He found some

way out the back of the boat –”

I tried to remember. “Liverpool was rubble.”

The surface of the Moon. But Sick Note might have found some cellars, where things had survived – GE cookers and Philco fridges and Beatle albums – sheltered from the fire storms, preserved since 1971.

I felt scared again.

“We’re running out of LP,” said Lightoller.

“So what?”

“So there are a lot of great tracks not here,” he said.

“Like Lennon’s ‘Love’. Harrison’s ‘My Sweet Lord’ and ‘What Is Life’. ‘Imagine’, for fook’s sake.”

“They must have been issuing singles.”

“You’re right.” I could hear the pain in Lightoller’s voice. “And we’ll never get to hear them.”

“But if we found the other world...”

We were silent for a while, just listening.

Lightoller said softly, “What if we couldn’t find our way back?”

I shrugged. “Sick Note did.”

He eyed me. “Are you sure?”

Neither of us tried it.

The fifth track was “God,” in which Lennon, at great and obsessive length, discarded his childish idols, including Jesus, Elvis, Dylan, even the Beatles.

“Oh,” said Lightoller. “There’s the compromise. What McCartney agreed, to keep Lennon on board.”

“That and not doing ‘Teddy Boy’.”

“At least Lennon didn’t push for ‘Mother’.”

I tried to focus on the music. The production didn’t sound to me much different from the way I’d heard it on the *Plastic Ono Band* album.

But some unruly piece of my brain wasn’t thinking about the Beatles.

Sick Note had said he saw shooting stars, everywhere, over ruined Liverpool. *Oh*.

“Comets,” I said.

Lightoller said, “Comets?”

“Not nuclear war. Comets. That’s it. If a comet hit the Earth, debris would be thrown up out of the atmosphere. Molten blobs of rock. They would re-enter the atmosphere as –”

“A skyful of shooting stars.”

“Yes. They would reach low orbit, keep falling for years. The air would burn. Nitrous oxides, acid rain – the global temperatures would be raised all to hell.”

“So in some alternate world a comet landed on Yoko, and the Beatles never broke up.” Lightoller laughed. “Only a true Beatles fan would lay waste to the fooking Earth to get a new album.”

“I don’t think this is funny, Lightoller.”

“God” wound to its leaden close. The stylus hissed on the spiralling intertrack, and Lightoller and I watched it. I knew what he was thinking, because I was thinking exactly the same.

This would be the ultimate track – the twelfth track on the twelfth album.

The last new Beatles song we would ever hear.

Because, of course, by now we both believed.

It was recognizable from the first, faded-in, descending piano chords. But then the vocals opened – and it was Lennon.

“It’s ‘Maybe I’m Amazed’,” I said, awed. “McCartney’s

greatest post-Beatles song –”

“Just listen to it,” said Lightoller. “He gave it to Lennon. *Listen* to it.”

It didn’t sound like the version from our world, which McCartney, battered and bruised from the break-up, recorded in his kitchen.

Lennon’s raw, majestic voice wrenched at the melody, while McCartney’s melodic bass, Starr’s powerful drumming, and Harrison’s wailing guitar drove through the song’s complex, compulsive chromatic structure. And then a long coda opened up, underpinned by clean, thrusting brass, obviously scored by George Martin.

At last the coda wound down to a final, almost whispered lament by Lennon, a final descending chord sequence, a last trickle of piano notes, as if the song itself couldn’t bear to finish.

The stylus hissed briefly, reached the run-off groove, and lifted.

Lightoller and I just sat there, stunned.

Then the magic faded, and I got an unwelcome dose of reality: a sense of place, where we were and what we had become: two slightly sad, slightly overweight, forty-ish guys mourning the passing of a friend, and another little part of our own youth.

Lightoller put the album back in its sleeve, and slotted it carefully into its place.

We found our way outside, to the dock.

The old ship’s stern towered over us. It was late by then, and the ship blazed with light from its big promenade decks and the long rows of portholes. Up top, I could see the four big funnels and the lacework of masts and rigging. People were crossing the permanent gangways that had been bolted to the side of the ship, like leashes to make sure she never shook loose again.

“She’s an old relic,” said Lightoller. “Just like Sick Note.”

“Yeah.”

“All fooking bullshit, of course,” he said.

“Other worlds?”

“Yeah.”

It was starting to rain, and I felt depressed, sour, mildly hung over. I looked up at the stern and saw how the post-Heseltine paint job had weathered. Even the lettering was running. You could still make out the registration, LIVERPOOL, but the ship’s name was obscured, the I’s and T’s and the N streaking down over the hull, the A and C just blurred.

We turned our backs and started the walk to the bus stop.

Lightoller and I don’t talk about it much.

I’d like to have heard those singles, though.

Stephen Baxter’s latest novel is *Titan* (HarperCollins/Voyager, 1997) and his book before that was *Vacuum Diagrams: Stories of the Xeelee Sequence* (much of which first appeared in *Interzone*). His next volume has been announced as *Traces* (Voyager, April 1998) – a large book which collects most of his other stories from *IZ* and elsewhere.

Courtney had never considered squid love before. She was an accountant for a Chicago restaurant chain, and not really looking. After a bitter, acrimonious divorce, Courtney was burned out on romance.

Then she met Mario.

Usually, Courtney worked out at a local racquet club. But, tired of the yuppie crowd in designer Lycra and five hundred dollar athletic shoes, she decided to go bowling.

Mario caught her eye at once. Holding the bowling ball in three tentacles, he had a hard time slithering forward fast enough to give the ball momentum. But his superior co-ordination helped him score many a strike.

Mario noticed her, too. He suctioned over and asked her to share a cold brew.

His accent was educated, but not pretentious, with a touch of Romano. He wore only bowling shoes. A naked squid ordinarily would have embarrassed Courtney, but the lack of expensive polo shirt seemed refreshing.

"So what do you do?" she asked.

Colours rippled across Mario's hide, and he dipped a tentacle in his O'Doul's. "I'm a professional ball player."

"A bowler?" If he could do that to a bowling ball, what could he do for her!

"I'm an outfielder for the Cicero Cephalopods. Just minor league. And you?"

They found much in common despite the difference in phylum. But Courtney was determined not to be swept off her feet, and it wasn't until their third date that she invited him into her apartment.

He seemed so shy. She helped him out of the little plastic jacket he wore, something like the wrapping on those freeze-dried Japanese snacks. And then he wrapped his arms around and around and around and around and around her.

"Cara mia," said he.

"Calimari," said she.

He turned on her CD player and gathered her closer.

"I'll never let you go," he murmured, and they swayed with a medley of tunes from *South Pacific*, "Yellow Submarine," and Handel's *Water Music*.

She found him different, tender, enveloping.

Later, as she pried his suction cups off her abdomen, she asked. "Have you ever tried it in a swimming pool?"

Mario blew a puff out of his siphon. "No, but for you I'll do chlorine."

Three months later, she moved in with him.

Then one night she came home early and discovered him in the bidet, wrestling with a star-fish.

Arms and the Man

Mary A. Turzillo

"I thought we had something special!" she said.

The star-fish coolly slipped back into her Guccis. "I see I'm intruding," she said. "Ciao, Mario. See you at the club."

"Is it over between us, Mario?" Courtney asked.

Mario looked stricken. "I didn't want to tell you. We can never have children. The female in our matings dies ten days after the birth."

"I thought that was octopi."

"Would I lie to you? Here, call my mother, she's a doctor."

But Mario's indiscretions grew more frequent. First it was the identical twin swimming coaches at his club. Courtney wondered if perhaps Mario wanted someone with more limbs. Still, even those girls had only eight.

Suspicious egg-sacs appeared in the bathtub, and then, as he grew bolder, in the condo swimming pool. His team manager caught him fondling nine women in the stands as he caught a high ball with one tentacle.

When Courtney discovered that the entire Los Angeles Aquarium was naming him in a paternity suit, she knew she'd had it.

"Eat your heart out," he said, cold-bloodedly.

"I'd rather eat yours," she snapped.

He had seemed so tasteful, so tender.

And he was tender and tasty. As she finished the last of his delectable mantle, tears fell in her cocktail sauce.

She saved his pen and beak in a glass float like the ones they have in tacky seafood restaurants.

Months later, she called Mario's mother.

"That Mario," said the mother. "I told him oral sex would be the death of him. What a sucker."

Courtney was deeply moved that the mother would forgive her.

"Oh," said the mother. "It was only a matter of time. He was a Brief Thumbstall Squid. They do make excellent eating."

Years later, Courtney's children found the glass float hidden away among some old bowling shirts and fishnet stockings.

"Looks like a sentimental keepsake," said Calvin.

"Looks like Mom was a seafood lover," said Clarissa. They shook tentacles on that.

Mary A. Turzillo's previous stories for *Interzone* were "The Steel" (issue 61), "Crimes Against Nature" (issue 80) and "Eat or be Eaten: A Love Story" (issue 104). She lives in Warren, Ohio, and many other stories and poems by her have appeared in American magazines.

Queen of the Hill

Dominic Green

Sturlasson had barely taken ten steps out into the street on her first shift of her first day of her first tour of duty when a potential Confrontational Situation reared its Unconventionally Attractive head. An Equality-Dysfunctional Individual was standing in the centre of the street, making Stage One Physically Threatening Gestures at an Extraterrestrial American.

The old guy didn't look up to much. Sturlasson reckoned she could take him on without pulling the Scato gun. However, what he was doing to the E.A. was not strictly *illegal* as such – merely dancing round it, pulling faces, singing rude songs about Ants in the Pants and Rubber Tree Plants. Yet the E.A., twice the size of the little old geezer, was standing stock still and terrified. Granted, E.A.s would always swerve aside aloof when a T.A. passed them on the street, unwilling to share breath with a human being. *This is genuine fear, not unfriendliness*, Sturlasson's Xenorelations teacher (her/his/itself a Social) had said from the other side of the very large, very clean classroom desk. *Having such a small gene pool, we Socials are understandably very wary of infection from human sources. One sick individual could contaminate an entire Family. Earl, could you cover your mouth when you do that, please?*

Screw that, a voice had come from the back of the class. *This is his world, you're the aliens. And you're a nest, not a family. A fucking hive. Tell it like it is.*

That pupil had not prospered in the passing-out examinations.

The old guy was an old-guard down-and-out dressed in shabby Starfleet Surplus rags down which newspapers had been stuffed in lieu of underwear. A truncated headline announcing ...RENDERED FOUR YEARS AGO TO UN COMMAND ("...rave guys and gals on Social Homeworld are coming home heroes in time for Christma...") could be seen next to the white hairs on his chest. As Sturlasson had watched, he had walked right up close to a passing Remote-Hierarchy Social, and then jumped closer still, so close as to be a second skin, beaming in the Social's face. The Social – an Ancillary, blonde-haired, blue-eyed, perfect as a Platonic image of an angel – had reeled as if struck, and begun

turning frantically, no longer appearing human, like a bee in a hive dancing out the direction of the sun, its every move to escape foiled by the old guy dancing around it like a basketball player, blocking without actually touching. As if the oldster really wanted to be arrested, he looked straight at Sturlasson and winked at her through a military-issue prosthetic eye. The old bastard was actually *enjoying* it. Berdino Hive, an unsettlingly ordered collection of towers and pinnacles sprouting from a dome the size of an impossibly huge moon rolling across the horizon, rose above the rooftops; one building, the product of one mind which was in all probability observing Sturlasson's actions at this very moment. *Get it right, Sturlasson.*

"Hormonal signals," commentated the oldster as he danced, like a voice-over on a Natural History instructional. "They depend on 'em, like we depend on acetylcholine in our nervous system. They have a sense of smell a million times more powerful than you or I. Ever see a brain-scan of a Worker Emmet smelling a Queen Emmet's ass? The smell centres in their brains are huge. They don't see colour or hear Real Human Voices telling 'em not to mess the pavement too good because their nose has grabbed all the RAM for itself."

As the old geezer lectured, the Worker – correction, the Ancillary – was still turning circles, becoming ever more agitated; its human tormentor kept step with it with a determination and tenacity that convinced Sturlasson that direct action needed to be taken before her Supplier's wheezing turned into the strangulated gasps of a heart seizure.

Always remember, Patrolperson Sturlasson – we don't have Criminals, we have Suppliers. And those Suppliers are entitled to just as much consideration as are the major raw-material providers of any industry.

Finally, the little old devil leapt backward, and the Ancillary, a musclebound androgynous six-footer which could have twisted its human tormentor into Yogic pretzels, fled. The old guy stood back, his expensive dental work still gleaming.

"Hive mind's aware that a touch constitutes Assault and legally warrants self-defence," he smirked. "If I'd

so much as brushed her arm, she'd have laid me out; her and a dozen or so Workers who'd have come running like bears to a menstruating camper. But the Hive-Mind is slow – its nerve cells are individual Emmet Workers, and it takes time for it to make decisions. Confuse it, and it stays confused. Now look here; I picked on you cause you're the best-looking cop on the block. I don't want just *any* damned ammonia-breathed slic bastard escorting me back to my cellular sleeping quarters. I want a *better class* of slic. So, you gonna arrest me, or what? You Viking Valkyrie, you." He blew a kiss, which smelled of gasohol.

The Ancillary was drawing away from the old guy warily. Other Ancillaries nearby were moving away like ripples in an alien sea in which the old guy was a thrown stone. Once the Hive Mind made a decision, the decision was unanimous. Poison. Do not touch. Soon the street was empty save for Sturlasson, the oldster, and a small convoy of motorized wheelchairs carrying human Martian tourists.

"What's that, Mom?" said a small Martian, pointing at a retreating Social.

"It's an Extraterrestrial, Honey," said Mom, looking over gigantic butterfly sun-goggles.

"Wow," said the small child in evident admiration. "He must *really* be from Earth. He's *Extra*-Terrestrial. Is that old guy an Alien? He smells bad."

The old guy did, indeed, look and smell a damn sight less human than the classically-proportioned Social. Sturlasson wrinkled her nose. The old guy noticed.

"Hey, what now – is this a Loathsome Stinking Old Scumbag thing? I'll have you know I change my Headline regularly, young lady."

Sturlasson peered at the old guy's chest. "So how come you're still showing the War Armistice Celebrations, Grandad?"

The old guy looked down, slightly miffed. "Some headlines I like to wear regularly. Aintcha gonna take me in? I won the Terrestrial Medal for Meritorious Wounds on the Front of the Body at Warrior's Moon. I had to sell it to keep my 13 children, but I got it tattooed on my chest right here." He saluted. "Squad-Support Weapons Specialist O'Rahilly reporting for stockade duty MA'AM!"

"Coincidentally enough, I had that sob story tattooed on the inside of my eyelids at slic bastard training college," said Sturlasson. "My version has SOB STORY: DO NOT BELIEVE written at the end in big letters, an interesting variation in orally transmitted culture. Now fuck off before I do bold sweeping postmodernist bruises all over you, Supplier."

The old guy began to plead. "Aw, c'mon, officer, I was only calling you a fat-assed slic bastard whore mother to get myself a place in the cells for the night. Many of my closest associates are Icelandic. Your country suffered terribly in the struggle against your enemies and ours, the goddamned Emmets – God fuck 'em up the ass with a rusty Nuke Delivery Device with the fins turned backwards. Besides, it's a cold night, and –" He looked conspiratorially this way and that, blissfully unaware that he was being minutely recorded by over 13 Shopper Security mall cameras with shotgun microphones – "I got information."

"Do I look like a Consumer Information Survey?" Sturlasson leaned closer. "So what's the news on the

street? Don't tell me – the well-dressed panhandler is going to be wearing Newsprint this winter."

Specialist O'Rahilly leaned so close Sturlasson could have had a good Saturday night out on his breath alone.

"The air smells bad," he said.

And he danced away, giggling insanely.

Sturlasson next saw the old guy in the company of a Drag Queen. Of all creeping things upon the face of the earth, nothing crept lower than a Drag Queen. To be fascinated by an alien species defunct enough to have made immediate war on a species advanced enough to have turned the thousand largest hives on Social Prime into smoking radioactive craters overnight – was this civilized? To dress like a Social, act like a Social, adopt the weird Social way of walking in purposeful straight lines toward the next piece of productive labour needing to be done, to hang around pathetically outside Hive entrances trying to bluff your way in past the Protectors on guard, to go to Neurolinguistic Programming Counsellors claiming to have been "Born the Wrong Species" – was this weird as a white whale on water-skis? Most definitely yes. And they always dressed as Queens too. Never Protectors or Ancillaries. As if each and every Social who had ever lived had been a Queen.

But there was something even weirder about this one. A Drag Queen and O'Rahilly were approaching Sturlasson, but O'Rahilly's companion didn't want to come, pulling plaintively at the old Supplier's tenacious grip on his arm. Sturlasson had to admit that the Queen's grasp of the single sapphire-eyed, chiselled-cheekboned face possessed by all Socials was unparalleled, almost to the point of being –

Oh my God. He really is one of them.

"Erm – pleased to meet you, your Mothership," said Sturlasson, bowing as low as the heavy sonic shielding on her uniform would permit.

The O'Rahilly guffawed out long brown strings of spittle and tobacco. "I caughtcher there, I caughtcher! He ain't no Queen. Ain't no Drag Queen neither. Can you guess what he is, Ossifer?"

Even if the creature was no Queen, it could be no Ancillary; ancillaries spent all day hefting heavy equipment, and possessed arms twice as thick as this pallid specimen. And Sturlasson had seen diagrams of Soldiers and many, many war movies.

"A Concubine," she said. "O'Rahilly, this is seriously irregular. This – this, erm, person, is – well, Hive property."

"We are *not*," said the pallid specimen, maintaining the Queen fiction, trying to fend off O'Rahilly with scabby arms. O'Rahilly continued to talk whilst maintaining a secure grip on his merchandise. "Y'see, Joan here –"

To her horror, Sturlasson could not keep herself from laughing at a potential Supplier. "*Joan?*"

"– Jilted Joan, the Orgone Drone – his trade name, yunnerstan' – when he was a Drone his transport was rolled belly-up by rioters during that Jobs for Humans shit in '79, and nigh on 20 Drones en route to a stud Hive in Oregon ended up walking the streets in Watts. He wandered all over South Central LA for nine days without any of the alien-haters in the street noticing he wasn't entirely human. Ironic, huh? Anyways, in the

end he was arrested trying to bang down the night-loading door to Watts Hive with his head. Wanted to get in and bang the Queens, eh, Joan old fella?"

Joan grinned from ear to ear, that stupid grin that a lunatic gives when someone remarks at his ability to multiply 17-digit numbers in his head. Evidently Joan had been good at banging Queens.

"But Watts Hive didn't want him. He'd fallen out of the Nest. He didn't smell too good no more. Anyways, he was in hospital with severe self-inflicted skull fractures, and when he come out again he'd lost his sense of smell. No more hormonal messages. No control. Can't get it up no more, but at least he don't get killed and recycled in a nest-bottom fungus farm once his pecker drops from the horizontal. The Drag Queens love him – a real live Drone who'll treat them like royalty for the price of a pack of Alien Vitamin Supplements."

Now that the creature was close at hand, Sturlasson could see an acneous countenance beneath the heavy layers of cosmetics. The thing was not well. It needed its Alien Vitamin Supplements.

O'Rahilly nudged the Concubine. "Tell 'er, Joan. There's a Bad Smell in the air." He turned to Sturlasson. "Course, he can't smell hormones no more, but he can see the way they move. The way they dance. They say 99 per cent of what we Humans say to one another is through Nonverbal Body Language. Course, Emmets is nine per cent, on account of 90 per cent of what they say being Nonverbal Hormone Language, but... well, tell 'er, Joan."

Joan nodded, following Sturlasson like a dog's eyes following food. "We would dearly love to tell her. But a person with no sense of smell can hardly notice."

The food landed at the Concubine's feet, in the form of a small rectangular plastic card stamped LAPD GENERAL POLICE INFORMANTS' ACCOUNT. Joan scooped up the money with unabashed eagerness, and slotted it into a portable card-reader.

"Now what's so important that I have to pay for it?" said Sturlasson, fingering the Scato gun meaningfully.

Joan looked up and said, as if this were news that the Moon were about to crash into Southern California:

"The old Queen of Berdino Hive is about to die, and she has left no daughters."

"I don't understand any of that stuff," said Sturlasson. "I don't understand at all. Socials aren't primitives, they don't behave like animals –"

Sturlasson was accompanying O'Rahilly between blocks of huge, dilapidated Housing for a Better Tomorrow. Satellite dishes were propped in broken windows like the barrels of so many sniper rifles. Away from the bright plastic signs and illuminated shopfronts of the main streets, Sturlasson felt nervous. The few shops down these backstreets displayed cheap holograms of their goods in "windows" that were barely the thickness of a fingernail and covered heavy concrete shopfronts thick enough to resist ramming by a car.

"Didn't teach you all this at Social Relations Classes, huh? Too busy teaching you not to call 'em Emmets, shouldn't wonder. The Hives don't like folks to know the bad stuff, and the Hives pay for the Alien Relations Programme, so you don't get taught the bad stuff. Try and follow it through logically. You're an Emmet beaver-

ing in a hive, okay? Got that?"

Sturlasson found it difficult to imagine an ant beaver-ing in a hive, but tried it valiantly.

"Now, who makes babies in the Hive? Who, and only who?"

Sturlasson knew the answer to this one. "Well, Mothers," she said. "Only Mothers can reproduce. Ancillaries and Protectors are infertile, and Concubines only screw the Mothers; they can't produce eggs."

"Right. Now, how does this state of events come about?"

"The Mother – the Queen – releases hormones into the air. The lesser castes, supersensitive to Maternal hormones, pick it up and register the hormonal command not to breed, or, in the case of Concubines, to remain of the non-egg-producing sex."

"Right. So this begs the question, does it not, What Happens When There is No Queen?"

Sturlasson blinked. "The Ancillaries all die off eventually, because there is no one to produce eggs?"

O'Rahilly grinned. "Nope. Chaos. You get a Hive full of a thousand Queens. Don't forget, every Worker has sex organs – she just gets continual hormonal commands not to use 'em. Early in the Ugly Bug War, Combined Command decided on a strategy of hitting Hives with smart missiles and surgically removing the Queen. Then we foot grunts moved in like good little mammals and took everyone prisoner, which was real easy as their Other Ranks were disorientated. There were still Queen hormones around then, see, like persistent nerve agents, only they weren't pumping out any info. The Workers had nothing to do. Anyway, we'd crowd the Emmets into troop transports and zip them back to POW camps behind the lines, all above-board by the Geneva Convention. You remember, that 300-year-old document the Emmets never signed. I was a guard in one of them camps. First night, there was a really strong breeze in the compound, and all that hormonal shit washed off in five minutes flat."

Sturlasson was fascinated. "What happened then?"

"They fought each other for the top job. Like wild tigers. No – not like tigers. Like nothing on earth, 'cause that's what they are. Not ants, not men, not wildcats, but something you don't allow to set up camp in your own Back Yard." He shivered uncomfortably through his many layers of newspaper. Coincidentally, they were in O'Rahilly's own back yard at that very moment, in a metropolis of gasohol drums, steel packing crates and cardboard boxes whose inhabitants had vanished magically as soon as Sturlasson's uniform had appeared on Early Warning Pig Radar. O'Rahilly's own residence appeared to be a huge cardboard box weighted down with building bricks, and covered in cellophane stretched tight over scrunched tinfoil, just as a real live genuine field veteran might have built a survival shelter, if he were Down and trying to Survive in Enemy Territory. Sturlasson felt genuinely ashamed.

O'Rahilly noticed Sturlasson looking at his home. "My Chez Moi," he said. "Warmer than them fucking gunnite rabbit-hutches up there." He nodded at the low-income high-rises.

"What happened to you, at the prison camp?" said Sturlasson. "Did you try to stop them fighting? Did any of them escape?"

The old tramp shook his head. "Come morning we

were still outside on guard, but every Emmet inside the wire was dead or covered in its own slimy innards – and we didn't know enough Emmet physiology by then to patch up the infections in the survivors. That taught the Top Brass to abide by the fucking Geneva Convention. From then on, we Processed the bastards. Herded the whole lot of 'em into gas ovens the minute a Hive was captured. All them Evil Unconscionable Massacres of the Ugly Bug War. You know what the Emmets really think about 'em? They understand 'em. When a Queen dies, the whole Hive should die. Perfectly natural. But some of their Queens have been clever enough during the last few years to latch on to the fact that some of our boys didn't really like what they'd been doing. Hell, I didn't like what I was doing myself. But when you've seen newborn Emmet larvae crawling around a Hive nursery groping blind to fix their gums into each other's throats, shoving them in the back of a Mobile Field Oven and turning on the nitrogen feed is a merciful release, believe me. 'Course, today's Queens have noticed this, seen the horseshit our haemophilia-hearted War Poets typed out and sent back home to Momma, and they've used it as a weapon against the rest of us humans." He thumped himself vigorously on the chest to demonstrate his own humanity.

Sturlasson blinked to take in the enormity of what the nice brave old soldier was saying. "You took part in the Hive Massacres?"

"That I did." The old geezer spread his arms wide to take in the entire street. "And so did they all. So did we all. Your father. Your mother. If any of them had balls enough to carry a gun in the firing line, that is, rather than filling in forms in a quartermaster's office or pressing buttons to wipe out the Enemy from half a million miles' distance just like the Enemy wiped out Iceland. *The Queens don't care!* They only care about the death of another Queen. If your blood ain't blue, it can be sold by the gallon, is their motto." He donned a compassionate mask for a moment. "None of this is 'cause they're evil, mind. It's just the way they are." He turned to his Chez Soi and began packing a collection of essential belongings – a hundred-dollar coin with a hole in it, a diversity of champagne corks strung on string, numerous feet of small rodents. "All lucky," he explained. "I'm getting out of here before the shit Comes Down and Hits the Fan."

Sturlasson watched him fold up his collapsible home and walk off down the street to the invisible boundary between Berdino Hive and Riverside, where he set his house down under a house's warm reactor exhaust, having completed the Moving Manoeuvre. He waved cheerily at Sturlasson and said "BYE BYE, SAN BERDINO" in a high and squeaky voice.

He'll get himself helium poisoning, thought Sturlasson, and turned on her heel to go.

"Lieutenant, I gotta problem here. I don't know whether to just move the guy on for loitering in a chemically hazardous position, or arrest him as some sort of war criminal."

The face of Lieutenant Musszorgszky hovered in the holo viewer in bright red, to conserve Sturlasson's night vision. "Erm – we all did a few things we were ashamed of in the war, Sturlasson. Best to forgive and forget, let bygones be bygones, and do little or no crying over spilt

milk."

Musszorgszky had more white hairs on him than Sturlasson's mother or father. He had big meaty forearms, like a Ancillary's. Sturlasson could well imagine him shovelling dead Emmets into the burner. She switched the Lieutenant off, and went back to her burger and fries.

Shit. They'd left the microwave on defrost again. The fries tasted like some uncooked potato given to a prison-camp inmate. Socials were terrible at human meals. They had smell and taste sensors a million times more powerful than a man, but only in those areas that dealt with Social communications hormones. Upshot: If you didn't eat at a Social restaurant in Emmetown, you ate extremely badly. Sturlasson did not like Social food. It tasted like conversation.

She called out to a waitstaffer. "Hey! Excuse me. Could I have some cooked fries here, please?"

The waitstaffer didn't answer. Very weird. Usually they bounced up to you with big Disney smiles and the shortwave relay to the kitchen already flipped out. This one carried on sweeping the floor. Sturlasson watched it sweep the floor. It was sweeping the floor extremely badly, going mechanically over the last piece of glistering plastic as if it were trying to polish a hole in the tile.

There were still Queen hormones around, like persistent nerve agents, but they weren't pumping out any info.

The Queen is Dead. Long live the Proletarian Power Struggle.

Sturlasson eased her gun out of the holster. She looked down at it. This being cuddly peaceful Hivesville, she only needed to carry a Scato gun, of course. The thing projected a subsonic pulse causing the Human Bowels to shoot their load faster than the Human Urethra. A real discouragement for any self-respecting gang-banger, but it made arrests an odoriferous experience, only had a range of 40 or 50 metres in air, and had a nasty habit of killing innocent bystanders with weak bowels. Sturlasson would have preferred a good old-fashioned hypersonic minigun like the real cops carried.

Not quite sure why she was holding the gun, Sturlasson set down her coffee and walked out into the street. Ghost town. All around, Social Workers were carrying out the last menial task they had been instructed to perform, mindlessly. Piles of unloaded alien groceries were getting higher, and higher, and higher, as if in some weird Babylonian plot to reach the sky via use of sweet potatoes. Human tourists and businessguys were standing agog. Only one guy was not. He was a very good-looking guy, in sunglasses and a suit so sharp as to be dangerous to let near small children and lunatics, with a huge mobile uplink aerial protruding from his breast pocket. Cheapo penis substitute.

"Hey, you!" he shouted. "Officer! We got a serious situation here."

"No shit," said Sturlasson. "You have no idea. If you wouldn't mind moving along now, sir, I'm beginning to suspect this may be a Hazardous Area, and all citizens are respectfully requested to clear the streets."

"There's no time for that now," said the human. "We got about two hours before a Frontal System backed up by Heavy Cyclonic Winds hits this area from the south

and rains every Emmet hormone out of the air." He showed Sturlasson a wristwatch with Sturlasson assumed also provided weather reports.

He nodded at Sturlasson's shoulder-flashes. "You're a Social Relations officer, right? You know what No Queenz Meanz?"

Sturlasson nodded.

"I'm from the UN Social Executive," said the businessguy. "Strictly, this is an UNSEX matter, but we appreciate co-operation from Local Government Authorities." He extended a hand. "Special Agent Mordred Bullwinkle at your service."

Instead of accepting the hand, Sturlasson brought up the gun, which happened to be in her right hand by happy coincidence, and fired point blank into the Special Agent's face.

"I do wish you wouldn't do that," said the Special Agent. "It interferes with my C3 reception."

"They can make these Surrogates as expensive as they like," said Sturlasson, "but they'll never stop the artificial muscles generating static. You're covered in lint."

"I'm working from home," apologized Agent Bullwinkle through the Surrogate's mouth. "Apologies if this sounds slurred. I'm drinking a cup of coffee."

"If this is all so melonfarmingly important, why didn't you come down in person?"

"You kidding? This is a dangerous area as of half an hour previous when the Old Queen died. We don't risk trained government employees in situations like this. Besides, the Emmets *prefer* us to use Surrogates. They see them as being closer to Workers. Takes a great amount of self-control for a Queen to allow a real human being anywhere near her Hive, you know. Queens don't like being close to anything they can't control with hormones."

Noticing several of the tourists looking at her strangely, Sturlasson put away the Scato Gun. "Okay. So what's the deal?"

"The deal is, the Queen of Watts Hive has kindly agreed to contribute a Juvenile Queen to this one. It'll be coming down I-10 at 1:30 this morning under heavy armed guard, meaning Soldiers."

"Jesus. Armed *Soldiers*? Outside their Hive in the City?"

The Surrogate looked effectively crestfallen, a triumph of animatronic technology. "We had to do a lot of heavy negotiating to get the Watts Queen to not just let the Berdoo Hive go to shit and take out of all East Greater LA. Armed Soldiers on the streets were part of the deal. Y'see, most of the Queens in LA agreed the Watts Queen should move in on the Hive – she hasn't had too much reproductive luck of late – but there were a few who disagreed. Specifically, the Queens of Venice, Long Beach and Anaheim. An empty hive, already stocked with Workers, is a big glittery prize for the taking, and whoever gets their Juvenile in first, gets the jackpot."

"So our job is to help the Watts Juvenile in to Berdoo?"

The Surrogate looked round itself nervously. "No. Our job is to help *any* Juvenile in to Berdoo, and get the control rod back in the graphite as quickly as possible."

We won the War, thought Sturlasson chauvinistically, *to let it come to this. To let the enemy's prime shock troops motor down I-10 like a conquering army.*

The motorcade didn't look much like a conquering army, mercifully. No newshounds had picked up the scent, even if every Social in Southern California could smell the scent of panic on the wind. All that could be seen was a procession of plain white unmarked box vans.

I've never seen a Soldier. They live inside the Hives. I mean, I've seen pictures and shadowy old War footage, but you can never be sure how much of that is true these days –

Oops. Protectors. Not Soldiers. Soldiers was an overly entomological term. The Mothers didn't like to hear it used. *Remember, Patrolperson Sturlasson: this municipality depends on what economic investment the Mothers are prepared to pump into it. If it weren't for the Hive manufacturing those cheap foreign units the Military are so sure are inferior to good US iron, San Bernardino would collapse.*

The fact that the vans were unmarked was weird enough in LA, of course – in LA, every truck had the logo of its operators flowing across it in glorious motion technicolor, complete with light-sensitive areas that could be zapped for further information by any interested observer with a handy hypertext laser. But in a city where all else was weird, weird trucks should attract no attention. Sturlasson swung out into the left-hand lane and attempted to overtake the convoy. There were no Soldier outriders. It figured. Socials either travelled as an entire compact Hive, or not at all. That was why the huge truck. The Queen would be surrounded by Soldiers inside one of the trucks; the rest would be decoys driven by human hirelings. Metal trucks, of course, their insides invisible to radar and probably to ultrasound too, if they were lined with what Sturlasson's Scato-resistant underwear was made of –

–WHOOOSH–

"SHEEittt–"

Of course, one disadvantage of a steel van was that Home Defence Guided Missiles As Seen On TV would actually detonate *inside* it rather than after they had passed through it and out the other side. There had been a spate of guided missile attacks in South Central recently, and Sturlasson was glad to be sitting in a light plastic stealth-patrol dodgem with an eensy radar signature.

The first truck in line lit up like a Joke Shop cigar as fire streaked down from an overpass; luckily the convoy had been travelling in unashamedly military formation, spread out hogging all five lanes, rather than in line abreast, and the tumbling 18-wheeled fireball only caught one other vehicle at the tail end of the convoy, almost certainly killing the driver outright. Sturlasson summoned a medic using the dodgem's radio, just in case he had only suffered horrific internal injuries and full-thickness all-over-body burns.

But the attackers were no One-Shot-Wonder outfit, and they had more missilery up the spout. Two more vehicles, again at the front of the convoy, to cause maximum damage to the trucks at the back, went up as they passed under two more of the perilous overpasses. Individual wheels and axles bounced and gyrated down the roadway towards Bullwinkle and Sturlasson; Sturlasson swerved wildly, lifting the car's wheels dangerously and playing a bad violin sonata on the tyres. When she stopped concentrating on objects at a windshield's distance long enough to look at the convoy

ahead, she saw that the trucks, too, were slowing down and stopping in gigantic clouds of sulphurous oxides streaming from their wheels.

Tch-tch. That could corrupt the contact on the road surface. Could stop an engine temporarily. Could cause an accident.

The Soldiers had had enough. They were going to stop and fight.

Up on the overpasses, Sturlasson could see now that all the footsoldiers who had been firing down on the convoy were human. Small heads, small limbs, big bodies, operating weapons much smaller than themselves. Sturlasson felt sorry for them.

As the human figures pointed and shouted on the overpass, big-headed, huge-armed monsters started storming out of the middle remaining vehicle. She saw those figures only in silhouette, as one half second later she had thrown herself to the ground down the comforting six-inch gap between the crash barriers.

The Soldiers pouring from the middle vehicle were what the Enemy had been waiting for, however. A pillar of flame lanced down from the heavens, and the ground answered with a volcanic BOOM.

There was the barely perceptible sound of a light VTOL transport moving off on its forward jets above, hidden from view in the Southern Californian smog. Barely perceptible, since Sturlasson had been temporarily deafened by the blast.

Superb tactics. Throw in the humans to let the Juvenile think that's all she's up against, lure her into showing herself by committing her bodyguard against the pathetic enemy, then hit her with your own Soldiers. Sturlasson had heard that the Queen of Venice Hive had been a Soldier before she'd been advanced to Juvenile Queen status. Now she could well believe it.

She pulled herself to her feet, carefully. Over by the shattered wreck of the Queen truck, blast-damaged Soldiers were still crawling toward their weapons, like babies toward shiny new rattles, obeying the last order given to them before their Chain of Command was disconnected.

PHLUNGE

"Hey! Stop that! Hey! What the hell're you doing?"

PHLUNGE

The weapon was a silenced One-Inch-Wonder automatic. It went PHLUNGE.

"You want these Soldiers to be wandering around Beverly Hills in the next couple of hours packing HEAT, HESH and a death wish against anything else that can breed?" PHLUNGE PHLUNGE. PHLUNGE. Still-living Soldiers collapsed dead into the dirt, shot in creative new places Bullwinkle made up as he went along. Sturlasson got the uncomfortable feeling that genocide was how Bullwinkle dealt with executive stress.

"They're only ever going to attack each other! It's a hormone thing!"

PHLUNGE. PHLUNGE—

ZAP.

The Surrogate stopped, looked down. The radio transceiver in its top pocket was smouldering, weeping out bits of lithium battery over the expensive suit. Sturlasson dived back under the crashbarrier.

The Surrogate spoke. It spoke with the same voice as before, but in a calmer and more reassuring manner.

"Metaman ROM BIOS System, Copyright 2326, Qualcast Corporation, All Rights Reserved. Beginning Memory Test. Pull Right Tonsil to Bypass Initiation Files. Beginning NANOFLOPPY Anthropomorphic User Interface. Connecting to Remote Parasite; No Carrier. Initiating Emergency Rugged Self-Reliance System. Ahhhh, that's better. Fucker shot out my uplink."

So saying, he turned round and squeezed off a PHLUNGE at the top of the overpass. The lone human sniper sitting behind the crash-barrier exhaled involuntarily as a pound of lead tore through his lungs, then plunged fatally onto the superconductor apron 20 yards beneath. The weapon he had been using, a souped-up hypertext laser that would scarcely have burned the face off a pre-schooler, bounced when it hit the ground like the good Social-made hardware that it was.

Dear me. All that blood. That'll corrupt the contact on the road surface. That's a Traffic Hazard.

The Surrogate looked down at the gun in its hand, and at the bleeding Soldier bodies.

"Hmm. I suppose I did that, didn't I?"

Sturlasson sat up out of the crash barrier. "You surely did."

"If you don't mind my saying so, my operator is a bit of a Super Supreme Dorkburger with Cheese."

"I don't mind your saying so." Sturlasson walked back round the smouldering wreck of the Hongdu Cargofreighter that had held the Juvenile Queen. She stared into the tangle of charred bodies, pressed into one confusing mass as if huddling together to keep warm. "Which one is she?"

"The Juvenile Mother? That one there with the head only half burned."

"She looks almost like a Drone. Scabby-faced bitch."

"The scabs are caused by hormonal changes akin to puberty in humans. The Juvenile Mothers don't give off breeding inhibitor hormones to the same extent as the adult Mothers until they're sent out to found new Hives. If they gave out such hormones in an already-established Hive the lesser castes would turn on them and kill them. Had this Juvenile become an adult Mother, she would rapidly have developed a more fulsome figure as over 13 larvae per day passed through her."

It was difficult to imagine larvae *passing through* the young man/woman laid out dead in the cargofreighter. Sturlasson turned and kicked the body of a Soldier lying not-quite-dead on the road. "This one's still alive. You programmed for Alien First Aid?"

"They have both a superficial and an internal circulatory system based on two main hearts in the central thorax, plus numerous independent units. Place your finger on acupressure point Second Heart Constrictor One, just below the left collarbone."

Sturlasson felt down around the massive head, keeping well away from the teeth. *So this is an Ugly Bug.* The head was not even remotely human; huge bulldozer jaws with earthmoving teeth and, behind the skull, the sort of muscles bodybuilders could only pray to their sweaty steroid gods for to back the gnashers up. The crown of the head was shaped more like an axe-head than a cranium. The head itself was a weapon.

She placed her finger on the point. Not only did the bleeding stop, but the most recent blood spillage sucked back into the wound.

"Jesus," said Sturlasson.

"It'll now release special platelets and erythrocytes to clear up sucked-in air bubbles and cover the wound with a diaphragm of clotted blood thicker and tougher than the original skin," said the erstwhile-Bullwinkle. "And more flexible. Soldiers are also capable of regrowing lost arms blown off in battle, given time. Our surface infantry met Soldiers at only a few points, early in the Ugly Bug War. The Soldiers were at first thought to be representative samples of the entire Social species. This unnerved the Combined Command enough for them to inaugurate the historically unfortunate Smart Missile Queen Removal policy."

"Why are you telling me all this?"

"I've undergone an emergency reboot. My normal Read permissions are scrambled." The rebooted robot looked suddenly panic-stricken. "Why? Do you think this information should be classified?"

Sturlasson reassured it. "Oh no, no." She grinned as she dragged the Ugly Bug over the superconducting apron. "You want to tell me what colour panties the Combined Command President's wife wears while you're at it?"

"Normally she wears none, ma'am. I am a robot; I cannot tell a lie."

"Well, help me with the heavy end, and let's get this beastie into the back of the paddywagon. Mind the claws."

Sturlasson snapped the cuffs shut around the creature's arms and legs, having to go to maximum extension for the latter. It would probably chafe a little, but that would serve the bastard right for evolving into an Unconscionable Life Form.

She returned round the front of the vehicle, kicked the car forward until the contact antenna was on a patch not covered with rubber, dust, oil or blood, climbed in and began cheating with the vehicle's initiation files to allow Siren Velocity without engaging the siren so that small children and blind people would not know the patrol bug was coming.

"If you would pardon my impertinence, ma'am, why are we driving around at hazardous and illegal speeds in a car containing a behaviourally unstable creature twice the mass of an African Mountain Gorilla?"

"Everyone's out looking, Bullwinkle-as-was. But not for us. Not for a Soldier. For a Queen. Queens care only about Queens. They're trying like hell to get all their separate Juveniles into Berdoo to fill the monarchy vacuum. But what happens when a Soldier's isolated from a Queen's influence too long?"

The non-Bullwinkle thought for a moment. "Well... it begins to emit Queen hormones."

"Precisely. So all we have to do is drive this bastard around Berdoo until she-or-he starts emitting, right?"

The Surrogate considered this. "Nominally a most excellent plan, ma'am. However, in the absence of advanced spectrometry equipment, how are we to know that the erstwhile warrior has commenced to emit the correct hormones?"

Sturlasson's eyes became filled with a light of happy insanity. "Easy. We just keep the pedal to the metal till the local Soldiers start shooting at us."

With that, she ducked under the dashboard as the first Squash Head of Spring sang through her offside window.

"You will observe these are Worker snipers. Had they been Soldiers, we would of course have been instantaneously torn to ribbons."

The Surrogate made such cheery conversation as bullets ripped through the windows all about it. Sturlasson huddled under the dash with her hands over her ears, kneeling devoutly on the accelerator. Due to straitened Police Department finances, the patrolbug was made of ETERNYLON®, that miraculous plastic that bounced back into shape after being deformed by collisions, thus cutting down on expensive bodywork bills. Unfortunately, this also meant that *during* a collision the bug would quite cheerfully twist itself into a pretzel with the driver and passengers still inside it. Being inside it whilst it was under heavy machine-gun fire from all directions was like being in a skin-tight rubber suit in a school of eels. Sturlasson hoped they hadn't coated the road with insulating gel; then the car's engine would stop dead and they would coast to a halt in a squall of gunfire. Still, it was raining quite heavily now, and the rain would help the contact –

"How did they get access to weapons?"

"They may be hormone-crazed, but they're not animals. They're still possessed of just as much reasoning power as you or I. They're not shooting at us, of course; only at our inhuman cargo. If you would only raise your head and look, you would see that they are also devoting a lot of time to shooting at each other." The car veered wildly as the robot steered it with one hand around unseen obstructions.

"I have no intention of raising my head and looking," said Sturlasson. "What's on the road?" she added, not really wanting to know the answer.

"A family of Martian tourists in wheelchairs. It's likely they got between a Worker and another Worker. There are also, obviously, many Worker corpses. No Soldier corpses. A Soldier normally wins this sort of engagement, for obvious reasons."

"Where are the Soldiers?"

"Probably behind the scenes, hunting down all the remaining Workers. As Our Boys on the Ground used to say in the Ugly Bug War, You Never See a Big Cat Till It Kills You."

"Very reassuring."

"The Soldiers may not be the ones we have to worry about. If they fire at our big bad friend here, they won't miss. You can poke your head out now, we're in a side street. No one around, unless there are any Soldiers present, of course."

Human neighbourhood, old buildings, narrow alley, high walls. Fire escapes. Seemingly a thousand windows, every single one of which could hold a Worker sniper. All doors closed, all ground floor windows barred and shuttered. Not surprising. Any humans not dead on the street would be cowering indoors with whatever weapons they kept under the bed or Under the Counter.

If we go out onto that main street again, we're Sitting Dead Ducks in a Barrel. But if we park up here, they'll find us.

"We're on the Service Road behind Nixon's Used and Abused," mused Sturlasson. "Hang right, then turn left just as soon as I say."

"Might I be informed in more detail of the reasoning behind this route?"

“–TURN LEFT–”

The car ploughed through Nixon’s hopelessly inequatable rear doors, of whose fragility their owner had been warned countless times by the Preventive Security Officer, and into the automart, among the wrecks and the write-offs that Nixon laughably described to his clientele as cars. The front window of the building had already been frosted by gunfire. Good. No one outside the franchise could see in. Sturlasson took back control of the wheel from the Surrogate and braked the dripping-wet bug to a gentle halt next to today’s Car of the Week (ISUZU CHINDOGU, 250,000 KM, NUMEROUS CAREFUL OWNERS).

“Now we’re In the Car, and In Hiding,” said Sturlasson in a voice of satisfaction.

The Surrogate shook its head, staring disapprovingly at the bullet-holes down the car’s fuselage. “We don’t fit. Our ride’s in better condition than most of the junk in here.”

“I’m getting out to take a look around. The further I am from Her Royal Highness here, the more comfortable I feel. If we’re humans on our own, the chances are we’ll be safe from attack –”

Sturlasson’s conversation was cut short by the great plate of glass in the front window shattering as a lone figure ran through it – not fell, but ran, as if there were things following it that were worse than running through plate glass. Though of a lithe and Dronelike build and shape, the figure was dressed as a Queen, running bruised and bloody from a big violent world suddenly revealed outside.

“Don’t tell me they’ve started to metamorphose into Queens already,” said Sturlasson.

“The metamorphosis doesn’t extend to clothing,” observed the Surrogate.

The creature scrambled up to Sturlasson and fell down the front of her uniform, holding on to the dress tunic and creating deep ingrained bloodstains that would be the very devil to wash out. “Thank God you’re here Officer, now I am safe,” it said, and died as someone shot it from behind.

“Jesus Christ,” said Sturlasson. “It’s a Drag Queen. They’re shooting at humans.”

Other Drag Queens began streaming in through the shattered entrance, shouting at Sturlasson and the Surrogate, holding up their hands in appeal. Sturlasson and the Surrogate began backing away as, one by one, the Drag Queens began dropping, dropping with a disturbing lack of ricochet sounds caused by inaccurate Workers missing the targets they were shooting at.

“Soldiers,” said the Surrogate, from their newly regrouped position behind a comfortably solid Nissan Eight-by-Eight in the showroom corner.

“Are Drag Queens that good?” said Sturlasson. “Can they really fool a real Social into shooting at them?”

“No. And all those Soldiers are acting as one fire team. If they’d been in contest for the throne, they’d have been firing at each other. I’m afraid that whatever the reason for them firing on those people, they had to have been ordered to do it. And the only thing that can order a Soldier is a Queen. Which means that someone has got a Juvenile into the Hive. But in that case, why would Soldiers be firing on human civilians? It’d take a crazy Queen to do that sort of thing, it’d cause an

Interspecies Incident, riots, Hives burnt down.”

*It’d take a crazy Queen to do that sort of thing –
She looks almost like a Drone. Scabby-faced bitch –
An acneous countenance beneath the heavy layers of cosmetics –*

Joan!

“She was a juvenile Queen all the time, and she never even knew,” said Sturlasson; not to the Surrogate, as one did not talk to furniture, but more to convince herself. “Brain damaged. No sense of smell. No hormonal commands. In a permanent state of puberty. Until the Old Queen died–”

“Sturlasson, what are you talking about?”

“Not-Quite-Bullwinkle old chum, we have got to get out of here very very fast. There’s a new girl in the Hive, and she’s been continually fucked over by us humans for two solid years, and now the only thing she’s interested in is revenge. Probably revenge against her own kind as much as against us, God knows they threw her out on the street because she didn’t smell right... What does Berdoo Hive manufacture?”

The Surrogate adopted the glazed look that meant he was accessing backing storage. Then he adopted a frightened look.

“Nuclear weapons for the US Military.”

Then he adopted no look at all as a claw on the end of a half-hundredweight arm took his face off. The face had been an expensive one, artificial micromusculature, eagle eyes, arteries that pumped, nervous tics that ticked, and now it was hanging off his head in tatters.

The Soldier from the car! It was taking commands from Queen Joan now.

Sturlasson dived under the car, discovered the car had been standing over an inspection pit, and collided with a concrete floor paved with spanners. Bravely disregarding the searing pain that screamed round her nervous system like a powder fuse, she went for her piece and fired up at the vague vanilla-and-pinstripe Yin-Yang symbol of Bullwinkle and Thing tumbling on the showroom floor above, discovered that the bodywork of the car above was made largely of steel, and succeeded only in giving herself a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach and a general brooding malaise. Ricochet. Damn.

As an Auxiliary Plan B, crawling out from under the car body with a handy auto-prop shaft, she brained the beast round the back of its nonexistent neck. The thing shook its head and ceased molesting Bullwinkle for long enough for Bullwinkle to kick it hard enough in its redundant reproductive organs to lift it a foot into the air. Before it hit the ground again, Sturlasson brained it again with the prop shaft. Before it had a chance to get seriously mad at all this horseplay, Bullwinkle had scrambled to his One-Inch Wonder and PHLUNGED it silently to death.

Sturlasson turned round, item of the Soldier’s demise in her hand, to be faced with a line of advancing Soldiers, all with the same faces as the Soldier she had just brained, like Hallowe’en masks they had all bought from the same genetic store.

“Ah. Whoops,” said Sturlasson.

Then the Soldiers stopped, well within rifle range of her, carefully placed their weapons on the floor, raised their paws meekly into the air and put them on their

heads. In the sky overhead, she could faintly hear the whoosh of VTOL transports. The drizzle outside now seemed tinged with a yellowish lustre, and there was an odd smell in the air, as if the rain were not entirely meteorological in nature.

Sturlasson advanced toward the Soldiers with the four-foot lump of steel clutched in both hands, as firmly as she dared.

"Right. You fuckers are under ARREST."

The room was businesslike, four walls, chairs, a desk, a tape-recorder. No doubt other, more insidious sensory and recording devices lurked behind its non-metallic walls. Three men – one American; one quiet Oriental, possibly Chinese; one who looked American but sounded European, possibly French or Swiss. All of them spoke perfect English, and still more perfect nonsense.

"So, let's go over the final part again, Sturlasson. After you disposed of the Soldier that had destroyed Surrogate XTC31125, you successfully confronted and overpowered by sheer force of your superior personality and training a group of Protectors in the throes of Mother Transition Madness Syndrome, convincing them to revert to a benign state of familial well-being."

"What happened to the robot?" said Sturlasson. "He looked fine apart from a little face damage."

The European looked painedly at the American, who spoke. "Surrogate XTC31125 has not been recovered," he said. "We fear it may have escaped radio control and gone rogue. The manufacturers feel it is safer for reasons of public panic that it be treated as a unit destroyed in action."

Sturlasson looked down at the printed document before her, and at the big white WITNESS'S SIGNATURE box. "Safer for the manufacturer's commercial reputation, perhaps."

The American remained perfectly calm. "The manufacturers feel that news of a semi-sentient creature on the loose in Los Angeles, possessing the ability to see in the dark, punch through walls, swim through boiling acid, and shrug off gunfire, might conceivably cause public panic. Do you see the logic of this opinion?"

"But the thousand-odd armed Soldiers sitting in Hives with sick and ageing Queens all over LA are just our alien good buddies, right?"

The American got mad. "Look, lady, it isn't your place to question why this has to be. There are reasons for all of this, good reasons, big business, interspecies *entente cordiale*, global security –" He was counting off good reasons on his fingers. He'd never have managed it in his head.

Sturlasson got mad back. "I was faced down by ten-plus Soldiers who could have put a bullet through my ringpiece in the dark, who had been *ordered* to hunt down *every human being* in the San Bernardino Area and *shoot to kill*. No momentary madness. No 'Mother Transition Syndrome.' And they laid off me, and surrendered. Just like that. Because of my Superior Personality and Training and MY ASS."

The American was about to go into meltdown, but suddenly seemed to soften, as if his brain had oozed out a secret trapdoor in the back of his skull. He sat back in his chair, the expression removed from his face as if by a damp dishrag. The European looked at the American, as though convincing himself the American was

not about to speak, then spoke:

"I wouldn't worry too much about the Hive threat in central Los Angeles. The Socials have been a tricky race to deal with, but we believe we have found the answer to our planet's Social Problems. We've been studying their hormonal communications for quite some time now, and we've really learned a great deal. Did you know, for example, that there are at least three distinct dialects? But I digress. At San Bernardino – at 'Berdoo' – we used an air-deployed, watered-down test version of one of our own concocted hormones, and were able to pacify the warring Workers and Soldiers on the ground with great rapidity, saving your own life in the process, I might add. Research is continuing. We feel we may even be able to completely supplant the Queens as the ruling power in the Social race by the end of this century. No more threat of war, and no more economic hardship for Terrestrial companies hit hard by the Socials' unfair manufacturing tactics."

Sturlasson was appalled. "You're going to cut the Queens out? Just like that? Turn the Workers into your cheap labour, and the Soldiers into your bargain-basement cannon fodder, and the Drones into your God-knows-what? You'd destroy an entire sentient species, just like that?"

The European seemed equally, if quietly, appalled. "Not *destroy*, surely. Merely control. Control is a necessary evil in any society. Surely you, a policewoman, must recognize that. Why, our experts are even hinting that there may be ways of putting our hormonal findings to use on humans." He smiled a winning little smile. "We're controlled by hormones too, you know."

The American and the Chinese smiled too, a sort of Mexican Wave smile that passed along the desk, perhaps at about the speed air molecules might travel under influence of air-conditioning.

Sturlasson smiled back. She stood up, removed a tiny over-expensive phial from her inside pocket, sprayed herself with its contents on the inside of both wrists, rubbed her wrists together, and rubbed the end-product on both sides of her neck. Hips swaying dangerously like a shark flicking its way through the sea toward prey, she crossed to the other side of the desk. She leaned over the American and whispered in his ear.

"Scat!"

The American suddenly leapt to his feet as if his chair seat were a gin trap, turning away from Sturlasson, revolving in a peculiar, animal manner, like a shark turning in the water trying to get a fix on a scent that it has lost. The European looked on with the sad expression of a man having a Really Bad Day.

"Consider me to have Escaped Radio Control and Gone Rogue," said Sturlasson to the European; then walked out of the interviewing chamber.

The American was still turning when she closed the door.

Dominic Green lives in Milton Keynes, and has written four previous stories for *Interzone*: "Moving Mysteriously" (issue 108), "Evertrue Carnadine" (issue 112), "Everywhen" (issue 118) and "The Cozumel Incident" (issue 121). A further story by him appeared in the original anthology *Decalog 5: Wonders – Ten Stories, a Billion Years, an Infinite Universe* edited by Paul Leonard and Jim Mortimore (Virgin, 1997).

Dryads

Sylvia M. Siddall

I was up on the hillside in the garden picking mushrooms when I was alerted by the trees. A tremor ran through the saplings in the grove, although there was no wind, no wind at all. Down in the woods the air was pooled as still and sleepy as summer itself in the dappled green-gold forest light. I stood up and watched in surprise as the tumult grew rapidly, until all the branches were thrashing with a huge, hissing roar like the surging of the ocean and every tree on the hill rocked like a ship. Then through the noise I heard Draga, my beautiful green-fingered mother, shouting to me, no, screaming at me, to come in, fetch my sister and come in at once. I realized from the panic in her voice that the order must have come because of something Fenyofa had told her, for I could see no reason for such alarm. I had never seen the trees like this before, so strangely disturbed, almost animal-like in their agitation.

Trefa was playing with her pine-cone dollies in a patch of sunlight further up on the hill and I ran to her, sweeping her up with her toys in a big astonished bundle and turning to run home, but first I paused and looked around. For a moment I could see nothing but the city, the massed green spires of houses interspersed by a regular pattern of young trees, and expanses of grassy parks where cows and sheep grazed in herds. The exclusive homes of oak and beech, their brighter leaves contrasting with the pines, did not look quite as peaceful as usual, even they had caught the mood of unease. Like the saplings, their stately branches swayed and dipped in patterns of rippling waves. Then I looked to the north.

Far away, yet clear as though magnified through a lens of hot air, a column of smoke rose high, its crest boiling over to form a grey-white cloud that was dazzling in the sunlight but dark beneath. It grew with an almost natural inevitability, like a storm brewing. Then I felt a vast concussion, through my feet more than my ears, the ground shuddered and I saw all the trees surge as if they attempted to loosen their roots and tear themselves free of the earth to walk away. I knew then that we must be at war, and fear poured through me like a rush of scalding water.

I fled down the hillside, running through the shafts of sunlight that lay between the wide dark boles of the trees. Above me, branches whipped the air so hard that I felt breezes buffet me from this side and that, and leaves that should not have been shed for months were dashed free to flutter past my face like errant green moths, scattering from the oaks and the birches. Even our own giant, the pine, swayed and bowed his tufted prow, and pine needles pattered on the leaf-mould. I fell against him, momentarily gaining comfort from the

warm, serrated hide of his bark, before pushing through the front door. It slammed behind me with the hollow noise of wood on wood, but there was a splintering, grating quality that I did not like, a finality, or perhaps this is merely hindsight, and all I knew at that instant was relief, that we were inside Fenyofa, and safe.

"Come down!" Draga called from below, her voice sounding hollow and eerie like the cry of a rook. I waited for my eyes to adjust in the dimness of Fenyofa's phosphorescent lights. I glanced up once, towards the conker-coloured stairs that led to the airy living rooms high above me with their doors and windows opening onto platforms of woven branches. "Right down, Szeret, he says we'll only be safe underground!"

That made sense, and I put Trefa on her feet, assuring her that we had every single one of her dolls right here and the scarecrow would be perfectly safe outside since he was made of wood, and we hurried downwards, through the warm, living throat of our tree, down the steps between polished walls. I felt a puff of air on my back an instant before there was the sound of a door closing, a door that I had not even known existed. Fenyofa was taking no chances, but I did wonder how long he had been preparing for war. How long does it take a tree to grow a new door?

In the cold greenish light from the luciferin nodules in the ceiling, I saw Draga standing with Vadasz at the entrance to the root room.

"Right down there?" I asked and she nodded, her eyes wide.

"Why?" I disliked the root room, it had always smelled of mould and made me think of giant moles, crawling through the roots in a blind quest for lost children to crunch up like snails. A silly nightmare, but no worse than Trefa's dreams of great worms, sniffing after her to suck her inside their gullets. I had always assured her that her worms would be too busy escaping my moles to worry about her. Neither of us had dreamed about clouds in the shape of fungi.

"Because of the radiation. The soil and rock will protect us."

"Was that atomic?" I asked in awe, thinking of the pillar of smoke, so vast and so far away, that had looked so harmless, a summer cumulus.

"Yes, I'm afraid so."

"But that'll destroy the trees! They'll catch fire and burn."

"Not all of them. The northerners don't want to destroy the trees, they want to kill us, so they can get the trees that are left standing and take them over for their own use."

"Why?" Trefa asked. "There are lots of trees, Mummy, why can't they have any? They could take the baby trees home and grow them, like we grow Fenyofa's babies in the grove. We sold Mr Watkins and Mrs Ansty some baby trees, why can't we sell some to them?"

"Because the trees won't grow in the far north, darling, it's too cold for them, their poor little growing tips would be bitten by the frosts in the night and they'd die. Besides, the ground is frozen hard and their roots couldn't get through the earth. Nothing can grow up on the tundra except mosses and liverworts and other tough ground-dwelling plants. The northerners want to push us out so that they can live inside our trees."

"But they can't!" Little Trefa exclaimed, aghast. "Fenyofa's *our* tree! He wouldn't let them, would he? Would he, Mummy?"

We hurried down stairs that grew narrow, a tight squeeze for Vadasz, until the wooden passage opened out into the root room, or the place that had once been the root room, but how it had changed! Fenyofa had expanded the space hugely, he had grown light nodules in the roof, and sleeping alcoves sheltered by big knees of root, and there was a water-spout in one of the xylem walls and a sugar-drip from a phloem cable. Meaty fungi grew in an alcove, on a bed of rotted bark chippings and leaf-mould. He had even thrust up convoluted roots to make seats for us, and a flat table. In a separate room he had supplied a drainage shaft, where our wastes would be composted down among his deepest roots, to supply nutrients for his growth and maintenance while keeping our environment clean. He had thought of everything. There were books, and toys that Trefa thought she had misplaced, clothes, bedding, crockery, even dried vegetables and cans of meat to give variety to our diet. Fenyofa had collected all that we required, with the slow, inscrutable patience of plantkind. How had he brought these things here? Grown around them and carried them into the living rivers of his sap, to exude them down below, or did he have the ability to move parts of himself further and faster than we realized? I recalled the thrashing branches, when no wind blew.

"It looks like we're in for a long stay," Vadasz said grimly and I took a deep breath and nodded. The air smelled woody, infused with the scent of Fenyofa himself, resin and wood and leaf, and I realized that the air was being filtered through his leaves and diffused down in his heart-wood, not simply draughted in through a shaft in the earth. He must have feared that even the air would be poisoned. Trefa began to whimper and I handed her over to Vadasz.

"She's scared," I said, "and so am I. What about Fenyofa, isn't he frightened too? I mean, he's up there in the air, if they use more atomics he could be burned up. If they burned all his needles off he wouldn't be able to photosynthesize and we'd all die!"

Draga went to the wall, sliding her hands across the smooth wood of Fenyofa's insides, searching for an access port.

"Fenyofa is a bioconstruct, not a person," Vadasz remarked, "How can he be scared? He's mostly plant." I thought that my father was trying to reassure himself even more than us.

"He's not scared," Draga said eventually, very quietly,

"He's busy sending and receiving on the root-net. None of them are scared. They've been expecting this." She turned her face to us, pallid in the bioluminescence. "I'm getting more news coming in all the time. The northerners have set off a number of atomic explosions, perhaps they expect us all to be killed or weakened by the radioactive dust carried on the wind. Mostly the bombs were dropped away from the forests. The trees report some casualties, areas of the root-net have been knocked out completely. Saplings have been damaged where they've been exposed to the blasts. They're calling for a complete root-network across the world, for all sentient plant species. They're bringing new emergency connections on-line across the rivers and seas using giant kelps and other water species. They're very, very angry."

"What are they going to do?"

"Be patient, Szeret, let me concentrate." Her green-tipped fingers with their tapping nails slid and probed into Fenyofa's communication ports. "They're activating... symbionts?"

"Fungi," Vadasz muttered. "Trees have always had tame fungi connected to their roots systems. Does he mention spores? Pathogenic fungi, perhaps, there are species that can infect humans, they attack the lungs when they're breathed in."

"And pollen. They're throwing pollen into the wind as if every single plant wants to set seed at once. But it isn't normal pollen. I'm reading something about altered antigens. And the most northerly trees, the firs and spruces and pines, are producing toxins – not their usual insecticidal and fungicidal phenolics, they've been tinkering with the chemistry. That's why we've all got to stay below in the roots. They're going to release pollen and spores loaded with toxins harmless to plants, specifically aimed at humans, and coated with antigens, like those that cause hay-fever but much, much worse. The trees are able to filter them all out through their leaves so that they can supply clean air to their own people, and the toxins are broken down on contact with the soil, so that they're self-limiting."

"They're going to war?" Vadasz asked incredulously.

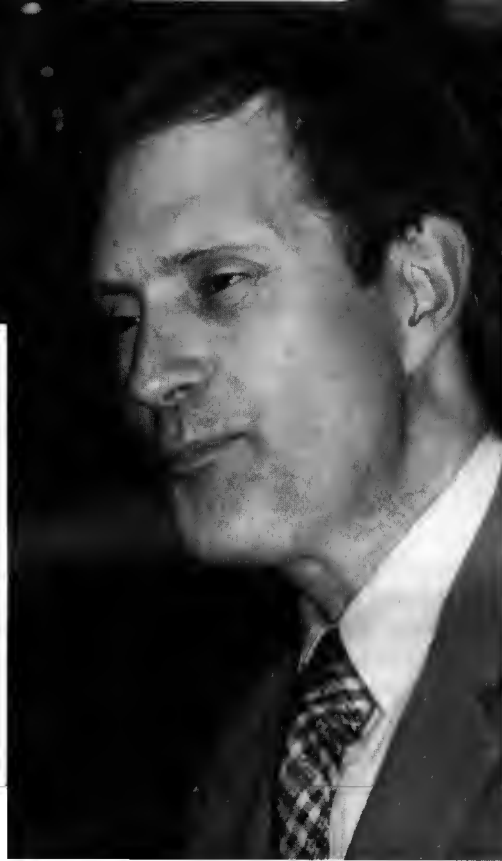
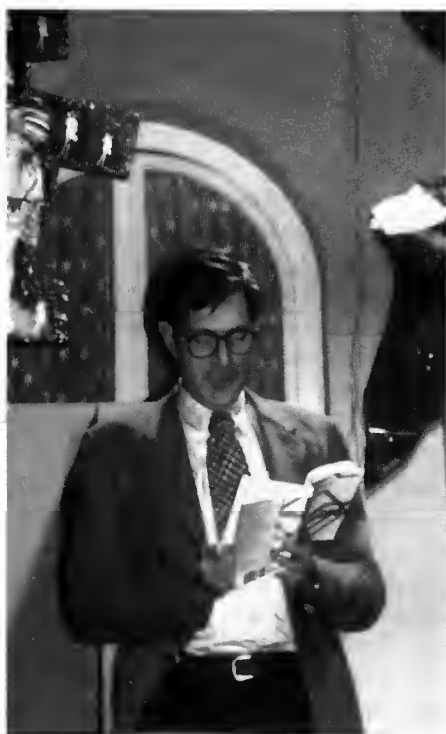
"That's what it looks like to me."

"But how can they? They weren't designed to go to war!"

"They're plants, love." Draga withdrew her hands and wiped them down her thighs in an unconscious motion of distaste. "I don't think they've ever stopped going to war. Plants have always fought each other for light and water and nutrients, and they have weapons against pathogenic fungi and insects. Plants have thorns and poisons and they can sting. I think we've given them the ability to specifically identify their latest enemy. Let's hope they're satisfied with wiping out the northerners above ground, shall we?"

She tried to smile, but she shivered as she spoke, and glanced around at the wooden walls of our tree, our home, our fortress. Our gaol.

Sylvia M. Siddall has previously contributed six stories to *Interzone*: "Kingfisher" (#30), "Thylacine, Thylacine" (#44), "The Perils of Unprotected Sex" (#84), "Housewife" (#92), "Written in the Flesh" (#95) and the lengthy "The Conflagration of the Gryffe" (#113). She lives in Northamptonshire, and has completed a first novel which has been doing the rounds.



At the launch party for Geoff Ryman's new novel 253 on 11 February 1998:
Centre: Geoff Ryman. Clockwise from top left: Roz Kaveney, Pat Cadigan with Devine, Jane Johnson, Paul McAuley, Pat Cadigan and Christopher Fowler, and Geoff reading from 253. (It is reviewed on page 61.)



Brian Stableford & John Clute

Gary Westfahl

Today, Brian Stableford and John Clute are properly regarded as two of our most erudite and insightful commentators on science fiction. For years, Stableford has produced books, articles and reviews that are widely appreciated as valuable sources of information and ideas, while Clute, long renowned for excellent reviews, has earned new prominence as a co-editor or author of definitive reference works. When virtuosos like these are observed speaking foolishly, as occurred in the December 1997 *Interzone*, that is cause for concern – and some discussion.

Although the knowledgeable Mike Ashley ("Interaction," *IZ* 128) has already criticized "Creators of Science Fiction, 10: Hugo Gernsback" (*IZ* 126), he was too kind to mention that the article, as is uncharacteristic of Stableford, included several factual errors. Gernsback's Menograph was a thought-recording device, not a "thought-reading device." Clement Fezandie was not the only writer who contributed new stories to both *Science and Invention* and *Amazing Stories*; G. Peyton Wertenbaker did so as well. Gernsback never intended to make *Amazing Stories* an all-reprint magazine, since he announced plans to publish new stories in the first issue and stated the same more emphatically in a special announcement in the second issue (which also featured a new story). E. E. "Doc" Smith, Stanton A. Coblentz, and John Taine all "found markets" for their fiction in the 1920s, not the

1930s, and the first two began their careers in Gernsback-edited magazines. Gernsback sold *Wonder Stories* in 1936, not 1933. There are other errors, none grievous, but the impression cumulatively imparted is that Stableford does not know very much about Gernsback and lacks any desire to learn more about him – an odd stance for someone presenting a purportedly authoritative article about Gernsback.

Yet any distress about incidental mistakes fades in the face of the egregious inaccuracy of the overall argument. Here is what Stableford would have you believe: Hugo Gernsback was a conniving scoundrel who wrote or published science fiction solely as another way to garner profits. At the instant when sf ceased to be lucrative, he immediately abandoned the field to focus on other larcenous schemes and, indeed, forgot about its very existence. Then, one day, he happened to meet Sam Moskowitz, who told him, "Hey, you're the father of science fiction" – in response to which Gernsback scratched his head and replied, "Well, if you say so, I guess I am."

There is regrettably no polite way to characterize this account, because it is simply not true. One could write a book presenting mountains of evidence to disprove it; indeed, both Ashley and I have done exactly that. Here are some facts: during every decade of his life in America, Gernsback wrote sf, wrote about sf, and published sf – usually extensively. Between 1926 and 1936, he launched

six sf magazines and wrote two dozen editorials and one article focused on the topic of sf. And what about the two decades when Stableford says he "showed not the slightest interest in science fiction"? In 1939, he produced an sf comic book, *Superworld Comics*; in 1943 (not the late 1950s, as Stableford implies), he began to privately publish annual magazine parodies featuring his "pseudo-journalistic exercise[s] in futurology," which he mailed out as Christmas cards; and in 1950, he revised the text of *Ralph 124C 41+* for its Second Edition, also writing a new "Preface."

Particularly objectionable is the hypothesis, stated as fact, that Moskowitz first identified Gernsback as "the father of science fiction" in the 1950s and gave Gernsback the idea. Throughout his career, Gernsback repeatedly and proudly praised himself as a pioneer in the field: in 1929, he wrote, "I started the movement of science fiction in America in 1908 through my first magazine, 'MODERN ELECTRICS'." In 1934, he chose a later starting date but still labelled himself the instigator of the "movement": "Not until 1926, when I launched my first Science Fiction magazine, was any concerted movement possible The movement since 1926, has grown by leaps and bounds until today there are literally hundreds of thousands of adherents of Science Fiction" By 1943, when reporters from *Time* and *Newsweek* magazine interviewed Gernsback about his first magazine parody, he surely identified himself as the

father of sf, since both magazines printed versions of the claim: Gernsback "is also generally credited with being the father of the modern science-fiction pulps" (*Newsweek*, January 3, 1944) and is "The father of pseudo-scientific fiction" (*Time*, January 3, 1944). One need search no further for evidence to contradict Stableford's thesis; these are smoking guns.

To be sure, Gernsback was an unscrupulous businessman and was hardly averse to profiting from his predilection for science fiction; but data confirming some underlying sincerity in his interest is overwhelming, and the many readers of *Amazing Stories* and its successors perceived that interest as sincere and responded accordingly. It is hard to believe that Gernsback could have had such an undeniable and profound impact on people like Moskowitz, Donald A. Wollheim, and John W. Campbell, Jr., if he had been doing it only for the money, if he had really thought of science fiction only as a "contemptible bastard."

So, why would the normally reliable and judicious Stableford produce such a sloppy and slanderous diatribe? Demonstrably, Stableford has an agenda, one with no place for Gernsback. As a champion of the "scientific romance," a tradition he observes in Britain from 1888 to 1950, he must discern a lamentable error of judgment in most histories of science fiction: after H. G. Wells, they unaccountably abandon the Mother Country, nodding only in the direction of Olaf Stapledon and C. S. Lewis, and rather than discussing major writers like John Glog and S. Fowler Wright they lavish attention on a grubby American and his loathsome magazines. Perhaps, then, by casting him only as an avaricious charlatan falsely elevated in importance by the myth-making Moskowitz, Stableford can persuade historians to de-emphasize this rude upstart and the literature he engendered. But it is a hard road to travel, with too many facts in the way.

However, while erasing a person from the history books by rewriting the past is problematic, another method is available: rewriting the future. That is, examining someone of conspicuous accomplishments, one can confidently predict that everything the person achieved will soon wither and fade away, so future historians will most likely ignore the person. Do you dislike Bill Gates? Well, you might concoct a scandalous "unauthorized biography" charging that Gates is merely an opportunistic crook who swindled his way to the top by stealing other people's ideas, or you could gather any available evi-

dence of nascent weaknesses in the Microsoft empire to contend that the company will soon collapse, with all of its products forgotten. Either way, you are striving to reduce Gates to insignificance; and it is by following the latter sort of strategy that my friend John Clute wages his own subtle campaign against Gernsback and his legacy.

Recently, whenever someone of importance in the field of science fiction dies, Clute seems driven to interpret that death as another portentous sign of the impending death of science fiction itself. After Moskowitz died, Clute (in *Ansible* 188) called sf "a genre intimately tied to the lives of those who created it as a literature and as a subculture, and who are dying now or dead," and went on to say, "I personally find myself thinking – as I thought when Isaac Asimov died – that the genre is, inevitably, losing its default voices. That ... sf had become far too amorphous to know long before Sam Moskowitz ceased his acts of knowing That he carried the template of his era down with him when he died." Now, in the column "Been Bondage" (*JZ* 126), he again sounds this elegiac note, describing the deaths of Judith Merrill and George Hay as "a warning shot at the heart of genre" and asserting that the literature they championed is now "mostly history," "a bondage of the been."

To be sure, Gernsback was an unscrupulous businessman...

Fresh Clute is delightful; stale Clute, much less so. Someday soon, another science-fiction giant is going to perish, and I do not want Clute to prepare another funeral oration for the premature burial of sf; so, a few words of gentle protest might forestall another descent into the rut.

The last time I saw Clute was at the 1996 World Science Fiction Convention in Los Angeles, in a large auditorium crowded with people, many of them far from elderly. That evening, Clute was handed a Hugo Award, in the form of a costly and beautiful statuette, for the Best Non-fiction Book of 1995, his popular *SF: The Illustrated Encyclopedia*. And at that time, taking part in a lavish videotaped presentation amidst throngs of enthusiasts, he said noth-

ing about participating in the death throes of a doomed and inexorably declining movement; in that setting at least, it would have been a difficult argument to make.

The problem with Clute's position is that he espouses a Great Man (or Great Person) theory of sf history: for decades, the genre was held together by its Great People; now, one by one, those Great People are dying; and when they are gone, the genre itself will lose its "shape" and quickly disintegrate. However, science fiction is better regarded as a successful institution, and one characteristic of such institutions is that they continue to survive even after the deaths of prominent constituents. The United States endured after the deaths of George Washington, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson; sf endured after the deaths of Gernsback, Campbell and Wollheim, and it will endure after the deaths of Moskowitz, Merrill and Hay. It is incongruous to hear Clute lamenting the loss of science fiction's "default voices" because he himself (like Stableford, to a lesser extent) has now *become* one of those voices, with a prose style – highly literate, bordering on the pretentious, but always motivated by an urgent desire to *communicate*, not merely play with words – that ideally reflects some current attitudes towards sf. That is how institutions work: one figure dies, but another

takes her place, doing the same job in a different but equally suitable way. The Book Review Department, first headed by Damon Knight, is now run by John Clute. Judith Merrill capably led the Annual Anthologies Division, but Gardner Dozois is currently in charge. Special Research Projects were long supervised by Sam Moskowitz, but Mike Ashley has taken control. Some members of the Default Voices Committee departed, so new members have been recruited.

Science fiction is a successful institution, in large part, because Gernsback ably supervised its initial construction. He established the first international organization of fans, the Science Fiction League, in 1934 (which Stableford somehow neglected to mention); and though he may have done so, as Frederik Pohl maintained, primarily to make money, he still beat the drum for that organization with remarkable vigour, featuring lengthy reports on League activities in every remaining issue of *Wonder Stories* that he edited. Even as the League itself faded away, the organizational impulse remained, expressed in various successor associations, and sf soon became an established genre bolstered by a well-organized and energetic support

group. And, several decades later, sf is still functioning pretty well, with more than enough talented writers producing original and memorable work, and fandom carrying on all its traditional enterprises.

Because no institution lasts forever (except, perhaps, the Catholic Church), one can legitimately worry about the long-term viability of both the literature and the community of science fiction, and I have myself speculated about one possible scenario for its eventual demise. But the beast remains alive and kicking today, and it seems indefensible, and even a bit rude, to seize upon every one of its personal tragedies as ineluctable evidence of its imminent death. Science fiction will perish only in response to a body blow, not a glancing wound. It will not die because a few beloved old people pass away, and it will not die because John Clute announces that it must.

When the perspicacious Clute repeatedly proclaims that sf is about to die, based on at best insufficient evidence, the unavoidable speculation is that Clute actually *wishes* sf as we know it to die; but why? The problem for the Canadian Clute, like the British Stableford, may be that the institution of science fiction was originally an *American* institution, and both fandom and the literature it espoused have retained a strong American flavour even as Gernsback's "movement" expanded to other nations and continents. (George Hay, for example, was undeniably British, but he was also a devotee of Campbell and a one-time follower of L. Ron Hubbard.) So, if the institution, the genre, even the *idea* of sf fades away, there may ensue a regrettable absence of large and vibrant organizations dispensing attractive awards, but authors and readers would otherwise be free to create and enjoy imaginative literature without the oppressive atmosphere of American-ness associated with the term "science fiction." And this is, perhaps, the utopia that Stableford and Clute dream of, explaining why Stableford endeavours to remove America from the past of sf, while Clute endeavours to remove America from its future.

Now, I fully realize that there are sensitive issues of national pride involved here. The panoply of American culture, much of it lacking in artistry or appeal, has spread – some might say like a disease – throughout the world. People in many countries may justifiably believe that their distinctive native cultures are being overwhelmed by an ugly tsunami of jeans, Coca Cola, and MTV. In the case of science fiction, commentators may resent, and seek to resist, the excessive influence of American

authors and approaches, and rewriting history or redacting the future so as to minimize the American presence may seem an appropriate procedure to liberate their worlds from suffocating cultural oppression. And it was undoubtedly emotions like these that inspired Stableford to dismiss my first defence of Gernsback and his centrality (in *Foundation* 47) with the comment, "Mr Westfahl has all the charm and sensitivity of the typical American tourist, and thus knows exactly how to put the British and Europeans firmly in their place."

Still, one must note, resentment about cultural oppression can go both ways. Reflecting habits that centuries of independence have not erased, numerous Americans continue to display a deferential attitude towards the Mother Country and all its works. For decades, Sunday nights on American public television

Fresh Clute is delightful; stale Clute much less so

have featured a procession of dull, mediocre BBC dramas, under the infuriating umbrella title of *Masterpiece Theatre*, which find a large and loyal audience of American viewers who evidently believe that celluloid was invented primarily for the purpose of recording actors with British accents dressed in impeccable period costumes delivering speeches to each other; and every year, an insufferably tedious movie of similar ilk invariably garners widespread critical acclaim and several Oscar nominations. American commercials selling pricey or supposedly upscale products habitually employ British performers and British settings to communicate the high status of persons using the product; an extremely expensive but otherwise unremarkable car called the Rolls Royce remains an American icon of automotive superiority. Devotion to the Royal Family is as strong in America as it is in Britain, amply evidenced by the unrelenting American media coverage of Princess Diana's death and the endless stream of tacky Diana "souvenirs" still being advertised and purchased by American consumers. And though it would be rash to discuss the extraordinarily controversial case of Louise Woodward, I will venture one opinion: if this had been the case of Louise

Sanchez, imported from Mexico to work as a nanny, the young woman would now be in prison, serving a long sentence; it was undoubtedly the charming cadences of that British accent that inspired a New England judge, deferentially, to be unprecedentedly lenient in sentencing her to no further imprisonment while simultaneously agreeing that she was guilty of a crime that normally mandates a prison term of three to five years.

Do I sound rabidly anti-British? Nothing could be farther from the truth; why, some of my best friends are British really. But there is a point to be made: back at the time when Americans were generally content to mind their own business, it was the British who were brutally and peremptorily imposing their own culture on countries throughout the world, implanting a residual belief in

British superiority that is still held by some residents of its former colonies and correspondingly resented by other residents of those nations. Thus, when critics born in or residing in Britain begin to belittle major figures in American science fiction, implicitly promoting the superiority of their British counterparts, or when they visibly long for the end to an American-dominated sf tradition, presumably in order to engender a literature that

might be well, a bit more British in its tone and timbre, then many Americans may start to feel that the British have once again come to put the Americans firmly in their place.

Yet all of these essentially irrelevant emotions about national cultures need to be removed from the picture, so we can dispassionately confront the narrow questions of the origins and status of modern science fiction. Making absolutely no general claims about the superiority or inferiority of things American or British, I do not find it culturally chauvinistic to assert that Americans, led by Gernsback, were the first people to truly recognize what sf was and how important it was, and were the first people to forge the field into a genre with recognized attributes and an effective support system, so that the triumph of the American model of sf was not merely a side-effect of American postcolonial hegemony, but was rather a triumph richly earned. Furthermore, I do not find it unreasonable to ask commentators to discuss the founder of that tradition in a reasonably thorough and accurate manner, or to ask them to display some respect for the power and durability of his work and the work of his many successors. It is, one might say, what the default voices of science fiction should do.

Gary Westfahl



War – What is it Good For?

Paul J. McAuley

I type this shortly after the British release of the first big sf movie of the year, Paul Verhoeven's spectacular and noisy simplification of Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* (1959), a bad book that's achieved an iconic status in the sf canon. It's bad not because it's badly written, but because it reeks of a bully triumphalism which allows no rhetoric but its own; the straw men set up in opposition to its ideas are either killed or co-opted. It romanticizes war, for its hero finds in war the loyalty and comradeship he fails to find in his own family; it codifies the anti-democratic Cold War diktat that you are either one of us or against us; and it preaches that violence is a kind of universal panacea. War is better than diplomacy; public whippings or executions keep down the crime rate; disagreements can be defused by a spot of physical combat (which, as Thomas M. Disch pointed out, is also an acceptable substitute for sex).

But bad though it is, *Starship Troopers* is also an important book in the development of sf. It was the first of Heinlein's novels in which he fully deployed his didactic solipsism (worse was to come), and was one of the first sf novels in which a libertarian agenda was made manifest – men and women of *Starship Troopers*' Federation can only become citizens in their society if they were willing to fight, a more honest depiction of a military oligarchy than, say, *Star Trek*. Heinlein's novel was controversial when it was first published, and remains so. It not only spawned a host of baby-Reaganite imitators (most published by Baen Books), but also a number of satires which attempted to undermine its ethos (as does Verhoeven's movie, in its dead-pan depiction of a fascist

Beverly Hills 90210). And it was certainly (we are now getting around to the subject at hand) the model for one of the most important sf texts about war, Joe Haldeman's *The Forever War* (1975).

Starship Troopers was grounded in Heinlein's own service during World War Two (Heinlein was a naval engineer stationed in Philadelphia), and in the paranoia of the Cold War (his Enemy, the implacable Bugs, are natural communists and not much removed from the implacable, bug-eyed Japanese troops depicted in American propaganda). *The Forever War* was grounded in Haldeman's

experiences as a soldier in the Vietnam War (he was badly wounded in combat) and is much more ambiguous in its approach to the experience and lessons of war. As in *Starship Troopers*, Haldeman's soldiers are armoured and flung into battle against Bugs, but they are progressively alienated from the civilians they are defending, and from their own humanity. *The Forever War* was not so much a satire on *Starship Troopers* as a sorrowful indictment of its naivety; it was an attempt to strip a central sf trope, the gung-ho soldier squashing ravening aliens in the name of all mankind, of its simplistic adolescent romanticism.

And now, with *Forever Peace* (Ace, \$21.95), Haldeman had written a thematic sequel to *The Forever War*, this time grounded in the experiences of American intervention in El Salvador and the Gulf War. In the middle of the next century, nanoforges have made the USA a cornucopia but have put most of its citizens out of work; those willing to serve part-time in the army get extra perks. Nanotechnology has also enabled mind-machine linkages. Powerful and almost invulnerable robot soldierboys, controlled by teams who literally share each other's minds, are deployed in the brush wars the USA is fighting in Central America. Julian Class is one of these soldiers, spending part of his time fighting by remote control, the rest as a research physicist helping develop a huge supercollider that will be built by nanoforges in orbit around Jupiter.

Although there is no physical danger in combat, the emotional toll of linking with others is great; one in ten die while linked through stress-induced strokes, and the suicide rate is high. When things go wrong during a routine mission to intimidate a Costa Rican village, Julian accidentally kills a boy, and is removed from active combat duty because he is judged to have a high potential for suicide. At the same time, his lover, Amelia, also a physicist, reveals that one of her colleagues has discovered that the Jupiter project could generate enough energy to destroy the Solar System. Soon, they are on the run from a group of religious fanatics called Enders, who want to complete the Jupiter Project and destroy humanity so that "God can start over."

Although thematically linked to Haldeman's earlier novel, *Forever Peace* is not a direct sequel, and is more complex than its predecessor. The aims of war are less straightforward, and the sequences in which the soldierboys are deployed against helpless Third World insurgents and civilians are both compellingly tense and morally complex and challenging; the Army is not the manipulative monolithic organization of *The*

Below: Joe Haldeman, author of *Forever Peace*



Photograph: Peter Fleissner

Forever War; Haldeman's depiction of a society rich in material wealth in which no one need work is intricate and believable, pointing up the gulf between First and Third Worlds. There are a number of James Bond-style face-offs between Julian and the trained killers which the Enders sent after him, but Haldeman's spare, punchy prose elides the melodrama and speeds along the complicated plot.

The resolution, involving a secret consequence of prolonged mind-linkage, is a little pat, and the ending, in which the world is transformed in the space of a couple of a pages, seems rushed; it's as if Haldeman was more interested in the complex moral issues raised by his solution to violence rather than the mechanics of applying it. Nevertheless, this is a rare and fine example of an sf book in which morality is ambiguous and characters are well-rounded, flawed but also sympathetic. In a genre in which character is too often defined by pseudo-Freudian flashbacks, and solutions to problems are applied as if a human dimension did not exist, Haldeman's adult intelligence is welcome.

There's this dinosaur, a jeep and an old woman in the desert... Not the setup of some dodgy saloon-bar joke, but the beginning of Stepan Chapman's remarkable science fantasy *The Troika* (Ministry of Whimsy Press, £12.95/\$14.99). The dinosaur, jeep and old woman form a dysfunctional family and endlessly trek across a desert world under three suns, encountering empty towns and cities, suffering sandstorms which swap their identities between the three bodies, and sometimes murderously turning on each other. The desert world is really a kind of virtual reality contained in a music box and run as a sort of purgatorial therapy by an angel. But the angel is crazy, and the music box is running down....

The Troika, Chapman's first novel, is a fixup of a number of short stories, several published in the early 1970s, but it is a polished mosaic. Shifting between the forms of dinosaur, jeep and old woman are a mother, father and daughter possessed by dreams of former lives in fantastical versions of the 20th century. The schizoid mother dreams of escaping sacrifice to the whale emperor of an Aztec-style civilization populated by a multitudinous variety of sea creatures; the autistic daughter dreams of being a soldier revived from frozen sleep and turned into a monster with a monstrous appetite; the father dreams of his human self becoming whittled away until he is a machine hunting bugs in a post-apocalyptic Arizona. Somehow, they must find a way of overcoming their obsessions and complete their quest by piecing together their past

from their fragmentary dreams, before they are trapped forever.

Chapman conveys his characters' involuted fantasies in a welter of remarkable and intensely imagined images. The narrative is as crowded and strange as a canvas by Hieronymus Bosch, and while it is sometimes touched by leaden whimsy (especially in the depiction of the angels, but that's a danger of working with them), Chapman neither allows symbolism to overwhelm it, nor loses control of its themes of redemption through self-knowledge and the double-edged nature of fantasy – its healing power and the dangerous quicksand of solipsism. It's a remarkable debut, with the inventive power of Steve Erickson or Jonathan Lethem. Recommended.

A standard trope of horror fiction plays off the tension between the known and the fantastic by having something nasty erupt into a realistically depicted corner of the world. In *Furnace* (HarperCollins, £16.99), Muriel Gray's second novel, the milieu is that of the diners, motels and gas stations of the US interstate highways, and the culture of the truckers who work there. Josh Spiller is a trucker who randomly chooses a turnoff in search of coffee, and ends up as the latest sacrificial pawn in a diabolic pact which maintains the improbable affluence of the cosy backwoods town of Furnace.

A woman deliberately pushes a baby under the wheels of his truck, but after a perfunctory interview by the police Josh is allowed to leave. Traumatized, he picks up a hitchhiking young woman, Griffin McFarlane, who claims to be on the run from some terrible secret. Slowly, it becomes apparent that Josh is the victim of a curse borrowed from M. R. James's famous story "Casting the Runes." He has accepted a set of

runes, and unless he can find someone to willingly take them from him in only a few days, he will be killed and dragged to hell by a demon.

The story, sometimes made clumsy by a resolute refusal to entertain the possibility of a narrative voice, as if this were a verbatim description of a movie rather than a novel, takes a while to gather pace. There's rather too much attention paid to a symbolic subplot concerning Josh's girlfriend and an unwanted pregnancy, and a complicated back-story which links the curse to Scottish witchcraft, while Josh is a slightly unbelievable hero, a rough-talking trucker's trucker who is also sensitive and sentimental. But Gray's depiction of trucking culture is convincingly detailed, and the accelerating rush towards the climax is skilfully handled, with several clever and nicely placed twists, including the revelation that Griffin McFarlane is not quite what she claims to be. It's a slick and entertaining performance that delivers just what it promises, no more, no less.

Jenny Jones's *Where the Children Cry* (Gollancz, £16.99) starts strongly. Four friends, traumatized in adolescence by the mysterious death of a Jewish boy at their school in York, are reunited as adults when one returns to York to nurse her terminally ill mother, and another, Joss, comes back to supervise computerization of interactive archaeological exhibits. But Joss's wife is Jewish, and his son is now the object of the attention of the sinister Sheepshanks, avatar of the white-robed hermit who incited the 12th-century massacre of York's Jewish community.

Jones writes very well about the quotidian routines of family and school life, nicely heightening the tension as these are disrupted by Sheepshanks's manifestations. Her depiction of the malevolent power of a paedophile teacher is restrained but chillingly telling, and her evocation of York's past is done with a keen sense of history and a fine eye for telling details which illustrate her theme of the dishonesty of making the past a cosy theme park – a sinister skull nestles amongst the fax machines and VDUs in the modern offices of a firm which turns archaeological findings into family entertainment; the grass slopes around Clifford's Tower, the site of the massacre, are planted with daffodils to prettify the place for tourists.

Unfortunately, the climax, as ghostly mobs feed on contemporary hatreds and sweep through the wintry night streets of York, and the four friends must prevent a recurrence of the tragedy, collapses into poorly realized melodrama. Almost the entire cast rushes about in a frenzied and



incoherent finale that lacks the power needed to climax Jones's well-founded but ultimately unsatisfying narrative.

The past is also the subject of most of the stories collected in Bradley Denton's *One Day Closer to Death* (St Martin's Press, \$23.95), but they are anything but nostalgic. The eight stories in his first mass-market collection (he's published two World Fantasy Award-winning limited-edition collections) may be themed around the subject of death, but they are by no means full of despair.

Although most were published in genre magazines, all but one are

either only tenuously fantasies, or can be read as straightforward mainstream stories. But all are unified by keen renderings of the particularities of their settings (either rural Kansas or Mississippi, where Denton grew up, or Austin, Texas, where he now lives) and by Denton's wry and acute observations on human fallibility.

The story which cleaves closest to genre conventions, "The Calvin Coolidge Home for Dead Comedians," is perhaps the best-known; its portrayal of Lenny Bruce and John Belushi trying to escape an unforgiving purgatory is both sentimental and scourging. Others include "Blackburn Bakes Cookies," an unsettling ghost

story and a previously uncollected tailpiece to Denton's *Blackburn*, a fine novel about a serial killer who murders because of an unbalanced sense of morality; "The Territory," a historical story about Mark Twain's redemptive involvement in a bit of almost forgotten Civil War history; and "Captain Coyote's Last Hunt," which is not so much about the supernaturally powerful coyote which disrupts the hunt as about a rite of passage for the narrator. All, in the end, are not so much about death, but about coming to terms with mortality, and the consequent end of childhood. All are fiercely and scrupulously honest, and memorably good.

Paul J. McAuley

Jean Hegland's debut novel *Into the Forest* (Arrow, £5.99), about two sisters living alone in a Northern California woodland after a general disaster has robbed them of all the things of civilization, is beautifully written, moving, and the kind of tale one has to call "wise" – a small masterpiece, in fact. First released by an American small press in 1996, it was reissued by a major New York publisher in late 1997, and now reaches Britain as a B-format paperback original. It's not described as science fiction, but the publishers compare it to Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and quote *Publishers Weekly* to the effect that it is "a truly admirable addition to a genre defined by George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*" – which is all familiar coded language for what readers of this magazine might understand as "literary sf." But it has not been reviewed, so far, in *Locus* or in any other genre periodical that I have seen.

Aside from its intrinsic virtues as a very readable text by a beguiling new voice, I find it doubly interesting: as yet another instance of a serious sf work presented as "mainstream," and as a clear example of a particular sub-genre which has long fascinated me, namely "California sf." The comparisons to Atwood, Orwell and Hoban are all somewhat wide of the mark, for what in effect this is (whether the author realizes it or not) is a feminine rewrite of George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* (1949), with echoes of Ursula Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* (1985). Jean Hegland makes no specific reference to Stewart or Le Guin, and it may well be that she has never read them (Stewart in particular is sadly lacking in honour in his home country these days), but she acknowledges as one of her sources a book called *The Way We Lived: California Indian Reminiscences, Stories, and Songs*. What happens in her finely detailed and deeply felt narrative is that the two teenage sisters, bereft of parents, schooling and all the gadgetry of

modern civilization (there are explicit "farewells" to electricity, telephones, automobiles, refrigerators, computers), re-adopt the foraging lifestyle of the California Indians of old: they take to the forest and learn to accept its bounty, recreating a way of survival in that land which, after

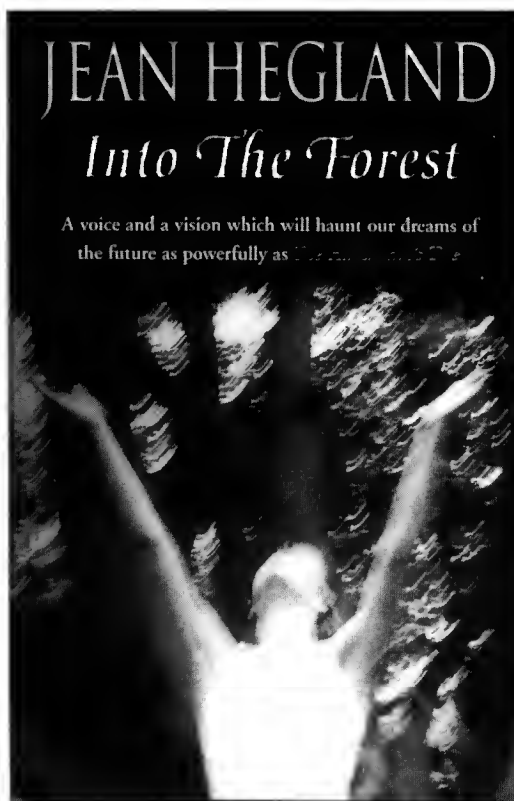
all, sufficed for 10,000 years before the coming of Europeans. In short, it is another "apology to Ishi" novel, as much of the best California sf tends to be.

Ishi, for those who may not be familiar with his true-life tale, was the stone-age California Indian who walked out of the northern hills one day in 1911, having lived alone for several years following the deaths of all other members of his tribe. His people had had no contact, other than the violent sort, with white American culture, and by the time he reached "civilization" there was no one left who spoke his language. A few years earlier he probably would have been killed, or would have died, rapidly and unmourned, from the white man's diseases; but luckily, by 1911, there were a few people who were capable of understanding him and providing him with a home and protection against the world. They were Professor A. L. Kroeber and his associates in the recently-founded anthropology department at the University of California, San Francisco. For about five years, before an unfamiliar disease did claim him, Ishi became a sort of living exhibit at the university and taught his protectors much about his extinct tribe's way of life. The story is told in the book *Ishi in Two Worlds* (1960) by Theodora Kroeber – herself only a child in Ishi's time, but later to marry Alfred Kroeber and become the mother of Ursula Le Guin. The narrative (although not specifically Mrs Kroeber's book) also formed the basis of a movie, *The Last of His Tribe* (1991), which starred the Native American actor Graham Greene (best known from *Dances with Wolves*) as Ishi and John Voight as Kroeber.

Ishi's story seems inherently science-fictional, almost a tale of time-travel, involving alien conquest and a stranger in a strange land. He came, quite literally, from the stone age, his people never having adopted agriculture or the working of metals, and he found himself living in a 20th-century metropolis of

Apologies to Ishi

David Pringle



telegraphs and trolleybuses and more people than he could ever have imagined existed on the face of the Earth. No one spoke his language (apart from a few book-learned words that the anthropologists were able to acquire), and no one knew the songs and tales and myths of his people – all were utterly gone. Those people had survived deep in the woods, virtually unknown and unchanged, on the margins of Californian society through all the years of Spanish and Mexican rule, and through a further 60 years in which their home had been incorporated into something called the United States of America, Land of the Free. When they did come into contact with white settlers they were hunted down and killed – to the point where they had been assumed to be extinct for decades. But Ishi survived to tell his story; and it is a profoundly moving story, perhaps the greatest of all American stories.

"The last wild Indian" became a nine-day wonder in San Francisco, and one of the local writers who possibly met him and was influenced by his life-story was Jack London, arguably the father of California sf. In 1911, the year of Ishi's appearance, London wrote his novella "The Scarlet Plague" (ironically, first published in England, in the appropriately-named *London Magazine*, in June 1912; it has just been reprinted in David Hartwell's big anthology *The Science Fiction Century*, Tor, 1997; Robinson, UK, 1998, £14.99). In this story London imagines an old man, in a ruined, reforested San Francisco of the 21st century, trying to explain to his uncomprehending "tribal" grandchildren what life was like back in the days of automobiles and airplanes. The youths, more interested in hunting with their bows and arrows, regard him tolerantly as a rambling old eccentric. I have never seen it suggested anywhere, but I suspect that London created his old hero as a kind of "inverted Ishi" – a representative of *our* civilization who is thrust into a hunter-gatherer society where nobody can possibly understand him. Over 30 years later George R. Stewart took this idea and turned it into a full-length novel, *Earth Abides*. Born in 1895 and educated at the University of California, Stewart certainly would have read Jack London, but whether or not he was consciously emulating London there can be no dispute that he had the real-life tale of Ishi very much in mind: his hero is called Isherwood Williams, or "Ish" for short, and he drives out of those same Northern California mountains to find a world where almost

everyone has died as the result of a mysterious new plague. Ish's attempts, over the next 60 years, to rebuild civilization result in a new tribal society, all literacy and high technology forgotten, and eventually he dies, an old man in his 80s babbling of incomprehensible things...

In my view, Stewart's book is the finest work of California sf, and the greatest "apology to Ishi." Apart from anything else, it is an excellent piece of ecological science fiction – Stewart knew the land, the animals and the natural phenomena – and wrote about the likely consequences of a large-scale disaster more authoritatively than anyone else has done in fiction. "Ecology," surely an unfamiliar concept to the general public in the 1940s, has become a global buzzword since Stewart wrote about it – not only in *Earth Abides* but in his more mundane California-set disaster novels, *Storm* (1941) and *Fire* (1948) and various other books – and of course it remains an enduring theme in California sf, from Ray Bradbury's classic *The Martian Chronicles* (in which California is reimagined as the Red Planet, complete with Ishi-like native inhabitants viewed, as it were, from the corner of the eye) to the two recent trilogies by Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Wild Shore* (1984), *The Gold*

Coast (1988) and *Pacific Edge* (1990), and *Red Mars* (1992), *Green Mars* (1993) and *Blue Mars* (1996) – the former very explicitly about California history and possibility, and the latter featuring Mars as a California surrogate once more (a few British examples excepted, most of the definitive "Mars novels" in sf have been written by California-based writers).

And then of course there is Ursula Le Guin – famously a resident of Portland, Oregon, but born and raised in California. As the daughter of Alfred and Theodora Kroeber, she must have grown up with the story of Ishi in her very bones, and although I am not aware that she has made any reference to it in her fiction (nor to Stewart's masterpiece in her non-fiction), her major book *Always Coming Home* may be viewed as another version of the same cyclical, Ishi-inspired story. It is set in Northern California, centuries hence, but instead of recounting the fall of our own civilization and the very beginnings of the new (as do London, and Stewart, and Jean Hegland) it tells of the long-term consequences: it is a utopian account, recollected in tranquillity, of a neo-tribal society based on California Indian ways – in short, it is Ishi vindicated.

So Hegland's book appeals in part because it is a pure example of this tradition – the major tradition, or cluster of traditions, of its author's home state. She does not mention Ishi, although she evokes two real-life female Ishi substitutes – the so-called Lone Woman of San Nicolas Island, who lived in solitude for nearly 20 years after her tribe had been deported (and eventually was "rescued" only to find, in the usual cruel irony, that all her people were dead or dispersed – she herself died a few days later); and Sally Bell, a California Indian who, at the age of about 90, left an account of the long-ago massacre of her tribe by whites and of how, in particular, she had run off into the woods *with her sister's heart in her hands*. Hegland weaves these two unbearably sad stories into her narrative, briefly and judiciously, making of her novel an apology to the Lone Woman, an apology to Sally Bell.

Nor does Jean Hegland (who, by the way, is never preachy or "New Agey") make mention of Stewart or Le Guin, or any other work of California sf – apart from Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles*, which features in a list of books her teenage narrator has read – but an outstanding contribution to California sf is what her novel most certainly is.

David Pringle

Below: Jean Hegland, author of *Into the Forest*



Author photograph: Chastner Fisher

One of the very first interactive computer games was called *The Hobbit*, and came with a copy of Tolkien's tale in the pack.

Whether the game was any good I don't know, but it's irrelevant to the quality of the book. Contrariwise, Rand Miller and David Wingrove's three *Myst* books derive from a computer game, but their literary qualities exist independently of it. They consist of *The Book of Atrus*, *The Book of Ti'ana* and most recently *The Book of D'ni* (Transworld, £17.99), and should be read in that order – chronologically *Ti'ana* comes first, but the fundamental conceit is only fully explained in *Atrus*.

The D'ni are a branch of the human race which has lived for millennia in gigantic caverns deep underground. There they have developed a technically sophisticated and highly formalized culture, which revolves round their ability to write D'ni Books (always uppercase). A D'ni Book is both recipe for and portal to another world (known to the D'ni as an Age), and there is some confusion among both the D'ni themselves and the authors as to exactly what that implies: Does the writing of a Book bring an Age into existence, with all its billions of years of prehistory, or does it merely specify the place to which the book will bring not only the author but anyone else who gets control of it? One would have thought that easy enough to test; modify a book to change the character of an Age, and see if the people there remember things being different. Unfortunately, the authors give credence to both theories, particularly in the first volume.

To make such a Book is no small responsibility, for unless it is made well, without internal inconsistencies, the Age will be unstable – or to put it another way, it will portray a short-lived and atypically benign era on a world which is normally inhospitable.

It's an interesting idea, for all that it's highly reminiscent of the Trumps of Zelazny's *Amber*, but the series suffers from the same problems as the unstable D'ni Ages – it has been thrown together in chunks by people with insufficient concept of structural integrity. Principally, and most damningly, D'ni society makes no sense. Were they confined to their caverns, the precedent-ridden D'ni polity would be grimly plausible, but the D'ni (and by association the authors) seem to be afflicted with failure of the imagination on an epic scale. They have been making their Books for millennia, but it has never occurred to anyone that a fair and empty world might be worth colonizing, or that its inhabitants might be worth cultivating. There are a number of prison Ages for malcontents and

criminals, and a cemetery Age, but mainly they are content to go there, gloat over a few miles of scenery, and go home.

All right, posit a desperately unimaginative race; unfortunately, Miller *et al.* lack the imagination. The D'ni are marginally credible in terms of our own culture, but not of

The Fantasies of Men

Chris Gilmore

theirs. Nor are they especially interesting; Atrus, hero of the first and third books, is described as having been named after his grandfather, who is the hero of the second book, and whose name is Aitrus. The inconsistency is strong enough to be irritating, but not strong enough to disguise the essential identity of the characters, whom I remember well enough – the sort of boy who's only moderately bright but works hard, has no great aptitude for games but cheers hard from the touchlines, acts as straight man when a master feels like making a joke (you can smell it a mile off), and winds up Head of School. In later life one looks forward to reading of his arrest for treason, fraud, or indecent assault, but don't hold your breath – they mainly drop out of sight.

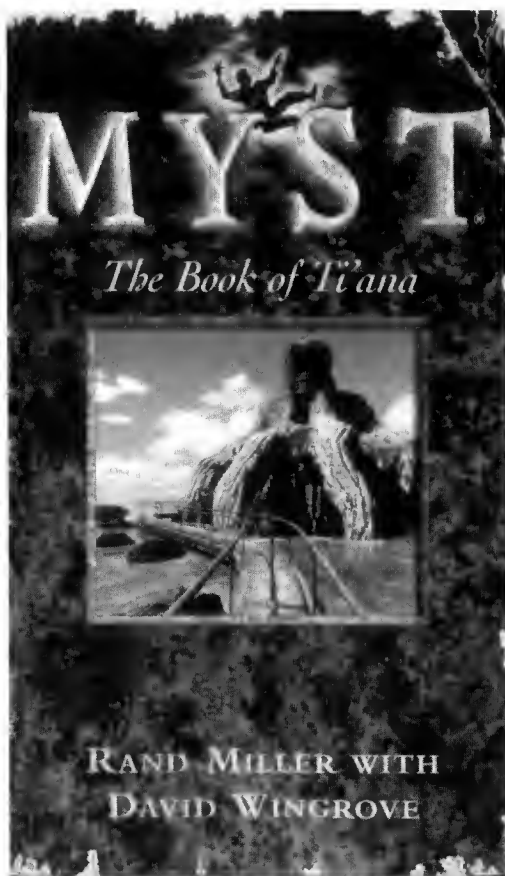
It's a pity the good guys are so feeble, because some of the scenes relating to moral weakness, intrigue and betrayal are well presented. At least one of the authors (I suspect Wingrove) has a good line in thoroughly nasty characters, with Gehn, the vain, domineering and fundamentally stupid son of Aitrus/father of Atrus being especially well drawn. But characters of all sorts need something worthwhile to do; the authors provide that OK, but only by means of grandiose idiot-plotting.

Suppose that a friend has married a thoroughly unsuitable woman. You might quarrel with him, or quietly drop him, and even (if you're sufficiently neurotic and vindictive) try to persuade your mutual friends to do the same; but enter into a plot to kill not only him and his family but everyone you have ever known plus millions of strangers? You, maybe not, but it's the reaction of Veovis, a highly regarded and successful D'ni – and D'ni culture has been stable for ten millennia.

The whole series is like that. To take another instance, in *Big Planet* Jack Vance concocted a complicated joke whose punchline was that an obviously contrived situation could nonetheless be made to work. The authors lift that joke, but play it straight: their punchline is that the obviously contrived situation is ... contrived.

Oh yes, there are three other "team-members" listed as contributing to this book, but none of them seems to know that the preterite of "lay" is "laid," or even that "loathe" is a verb (the adjective is "loath"). This information is freely available in any public library, a class of building much referred to in the *Myst* books. The authors should try visiting one.

There is never enough good writing of any sort, but good, authentic decadent writing is exceptionally rare, most *soi-disant*



decadence being only pornography with mock 19th-century embellishments. Martin Wilson's *The Castle of Oblivion* (Christoffel, £4.99) is therefore especially welcome, though it will not be to everyone's taste. The use of obscure references and the style of wit are both strongly reminiscent of R. A. Lafferty, though Wilson's spare narrative development is very different. He has an excellent eye for the grotesque and portrays, often in stomach-churning detail, the interaction of mental and physical ill-health in a context which evokes equally the lunacies of medieval asceticism, renaissance alchemical lore and the horrors of the Victorian nursery.

Prince Almeric has passed his entire life in an isolated castle, attended only by his jailer/manservant Manes, whose days and nights are devoted exclusively to the task of sustaining his life at the lowest possible ebb consistent with physical survival. By the time the book opens he should be on the verge of manhood, but what with the regime of semi-starvation, phlebotomy and debilitating drugs to which he has been subjected for longer than he can remember, his puberty has manifested itself only as an occasional involuntary emission, which Manes appropriates for use in alchemical experiments. Almeric's only solace is the castle's extensive library, wherein his favourite book is the *Ars Demonstrativa* of Ramon Lull.

Who decreed that he should be thus incarcerated is left obscure, though it has something to do with his potential as a magician, a potential that he brings to fruition if hardly to maturity by imposing Lull's philosophy on the physical universe, a magical operation which demands more physical strength than Manes is prepared to allow him. The entire book thus becomes a prolonged, unacknowledged battle between "master" and "servant" for control of Almeric's body and soul, and can be read in allegorical terms of the weaker partner striving to escape a baroque-ly ornamented game of *folie à deux*. The bravura climax involves a richly symbolic play which the two perform, ostensibly for their mutual amusement (no audience being present), but which is in fact a contest of magic versus manipulation. The conclusion is an unequivocal victory for magic, but leaves Almeric at something of a loose end. I await the promised sequel

with the keenest interest; meanwhile, I recommend this book to those of strong stomach, though with the proviso that it will read best with the stomach empty.

As I have been known to grumble when writers of Sword & Sorcery fail to provide a map of the locale, it ill becomes me to look askance at J.K. Haderack, who has certainly done so for his "epic fantasy," *Mercer's Whore* (Ripping, £5.99). On the other hand, as the coastline is shaped like a somewhat battered but serviceable set of male genitalia (side elevation), and as the first chapter describes a young couple's wedding night in some detail, I feel justified in asking who's kidding whom.

In fact, despite its distinctly blokish presentation (this imprint wears its unpretentiousness like a diamond tiara), and a fair amount of top-shelf writing, this is not at all a bad essay in S&S, mainly because the central sexual relationship is unusual and treated in some depth. In this world gentlemen-at-arms (the word "knight" is regarded as ill-omened) are expected to go on their quests, missions etc. accompanied by ladies, who must be either virgins or whores (wives, I presume, as the mothers of legitimate heirs, represent too serious an investment to be put at such casual hazard). Well enough, but sexual relationships being what they

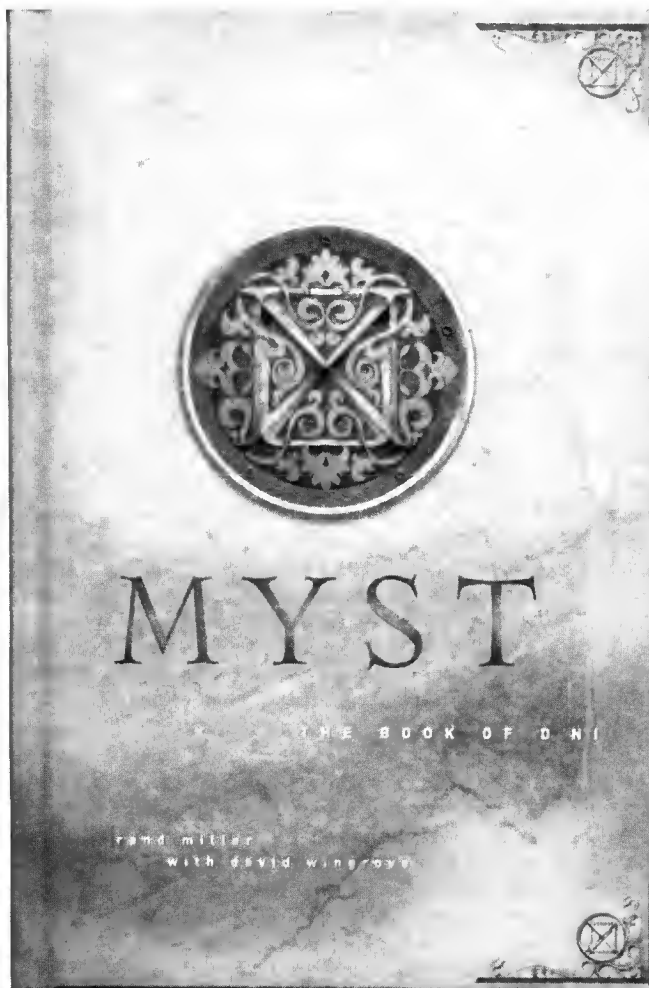
are, experience of shared danger causes both virgins and whores to take on wifely qualities.

Mercer, the hero of the title, is at the top of his profession, but by now overdue for retirement; he is sent on a last (and most likely fatal), quasi-diplomatic mission by his king with a single, younger man called Stayn as aide. Stayn brings along his sweetheart, virgin-by-courtesy Gadaire, Mercer brings Haye, his favourite whore. Their relationship provides the book's only claim to serious consideration, because Haye is a whore, a skilled professional who enjoys her work, and who certainly doesn't reserve herself for Mercer alone; while Mercer isn't above encouraging her to deploy her whore's skills as readily as her unusually long sight (a nice touch, that) if useful intelligence may be gathered thereby. Yet Haye truly loves Mercer, and the only reason Mercer has never asked her to marry him is that he feels certain that just one man would never be enough for her – emotionally even more than physically; translated from whore to wife, Haye would wither and die.

Their mission is rapidly overtaken by events, and the four find themselves battling with demons instead. The development and high body-count are both reminiscent of David Gemmell, but the atmosphere is very different, owing mainly to Haderack's decision to inject a mystical note which I found somewhat discordant. In this universe there's a goddess called Christa, who was crucified for the presumed good of her adherents, and whose priestess quoted the Bible, though not by name. I've distinct doubts about the theological status of that idea, though if you subscribe to the multiple-universe theory I suppose it's reasonable to have Christ die as often as Man falls. Likewise, if whatever the Holy Ghost uses as sperm contains both X and Y gametes, He would be She as often as not.

Aho, no skin off my nose – 'tain't my religion – but my suspicion is that those who take Christianity seriously won't be best pleased, while for those who don't take it at all it will ring as false as it did for me. In closing, I should add that the scenes of battle, murder and sudden death are numerous and proficently presented, while scenes of torture, mental anguish and lingering death are obviously Haderack's speciality – more matter for the strong of stomach.

Chris Gilmore



Every weekday evening during the time I spent in Gdansk, Poland, I was a subject in an experiment conducted by fear. My flat was in a part of town that was accurately nicknamed "the place where the knives fly." Having got off the tram, there was one long road near the end of which I lived. Imagine my joy at navigating quickly a pavement that was at best a rink of stalagmites and slush. And I had to do so looking *confident*. At every step I expected someone to jump out of a driveway or from behind a bush.

I mention this because I experienced a similar reaction when reading the early sections of *Black River* by Melanie Tem (Headline, £17.99). The opening is so charged and haunted that I hardly dared anticipate what might be ploughing into the side of my head on the next page. The Very Bad Thing happens early. Having set the main character up as a successful working woman with a loving family, Tem crucifies Renata's good luck by having their nine-year-old adopted son hang himself in his bedroom. Renata quickly learns the following: "Happiness was a trick of mirrors and scarves."

Renata's fast slide into depression is harrowingly described. Everything in her life is affected by her son's suicide, and she confirms "Ian is dead" so many times that the sentence takes on both the meaninglessness and the potency of a mantra. If it's painful to watch a bereaved mother going about her normal duties, it's especially painful to watch her, for example, try to dispose of her son's belongings: "Now she thought of Ian's glasses, so tiny they fit in the palm of her hand, and couldn't bring herself to imagine touching them, let alone deciding whether to keep them or throw them away. She thought of his collection of black-and-white 'generic bears'... She thought of his socks." So powerful is her grief that she discovers she is linked to other mothers who have lost children in the past. In hallucinatory dream states she travels down a bloody tunnel to learn these women's stories.

Healing becomes the sole purpose in Renata's life. She attends support groups, and what surprised me was the number of people who do not offer what one might think to be the usual platitudes. They make it clear that the pain will *not* go away, and Renata is disgusted with her family for supposedly healing as fast as they have. Nobody knows what she is going through, not even her best friend, who, having travelled a long distance to comfort her, insensitively announces at the shop: "Do they have postcards here? I want to send the kids a postcard of Denver." Renata re-examines her relationships with her husband and with her adopted daughter, who is too young not to

The Word and the Placebo

David Mathew

need her mother, but too proud to ask for help.

Perhaps the central section of the book is too long and repetitive, but then again, and more charitably, the author might argue that *grieving* is long and repetitive, and nothing changes for a very long time. Even in the dream world of what is described as "psychodelic grief" there are no answers:

"Do you know why my son killed himself?"

"No one knows."

"Did he mean to die? Did he understand that death is forever? Can you understand that when you're nine years old?"

"You'll never know."

Sudden breakthroughs are not apparent. When it seems that Renata might one day start to feel better, the strongest emotion she then experiences is guilt. At one point she asks: "...is it just grief doing bizarre things to my head? Or does grief open up your mind to things that are real but we don't perceive most of the time? Is it real in some way I never knew about before?" She has entered a realm in which a word is not even a placebo. No words will soothe away the death of a child, and Renata searches for hope as she walks a very cold road, not knowing at any moment what lies in wait.

Dark of the Night (Pumpkin Books, £15.99) is an anthology of horror stories edited by Stephen Jones, one of the genre's top anthologists – a very strong collection, unthemed, diverse and full of names that will be recognizable.

One writer I had not expected to see, however, was Stephen Baxter, who does not leave hard science behind for his appearance here with "Lines of Longitude," but mixes it with a thoughtful work about loneliness and a study of someone who *watches* a character's loneliness and does next to nothing about it. In "Futility Room" by Nicholas Royle a man and woman move into a new house, only for the man to discover that a former girlfriend is not happy with the new situation. Equally as obsessive as this ex

is the writer's fan in Ramsey Campbell's "Kill Me Hideously," which I already knew from the live recording called *Talking in the Dark* (briefly reviewed in *IZ* 128). Campbell's story is just as good on the page as it was out loud – full of clever wordplay as the fan's mental breakdown makes everybody hate her.

"Wyom..." by Richard Christian Matheson: Not bad. If you dig it. That type of thing... Teeny weeny sentences that snap through a page or two of a horror-tinged vignette have long been Matheson's trademark. If you're a fan of the horror genre you might have formed an opinion about Matheson by now. You will either think that his style of writing is akin to playing tennis with the nets down; or you will think that he is able to pack a punch with his stories – that they are seeds which only grow into the full bloom in the reader's head afterwards. Whatever. "Wyom..." is modestly successful, but there is not a single thing I could tell you about it that would not wreck the final line. Sorry.

Douglas Winter's "The Zombies of Madison County" is perhaps the most *unusual* story, which is saying something, and also one of the best. It's a clever pastiche (of *The Bridges of Madison County*), an effective tale of the undead, brimming with attention to detail, and furthermore, a story that one guesses might be autobiographical in places. (However, just because it contains a character named Douglas E. Winter, who is a lawyer and a writer, we should probably not read too much in to the moving descriptions of the deaths of people he loves.) Above all, it is a terribly sad story, so please forgive my *précis* if it makes it sound like a lark. Winter falls in love with a woman with whom he had a relationship years earlier – only this time round she's a zombie. And not to put too fine a point on it, when you give yourself to a zombie, you really *give yourself*. Being snogged by a member of the living dead might not be everyone's cup of tea, but Winter seems to be enjoying himself, so who are we to judge? "...in that moment, he knew, after so many years, the meaning of love." Aaah...

More zombies in "Two Worlds, and In Between" by Caitlin R. Kiernan, a sassy Southern Gothic tale of post-apocalyptic relationships, among other things. And if the thought of being *kissed* by a zombie is not grim enough, Ms Kiernan lovingly describes a form of oral sex between two women, one of whom is perhaps more dead than the other would prefer. I shall leave that to your imagination, and instead recommend this volume.

More short stories now, although quite long short stories, and this time from a single author. Laurence Staig in *Technofear* (Scholastic, £4.99) gives a varied collection that

pulled this reviewer's opinion one way and then the other. On the positive side, the stories are nicely varied, nicely paced, and treat children with respect. On the other hand, some sentences are ambiguous, lazy, or even agrammatical: "Jess peered across the square. There were a small line of shops, but in the centre was a canopy above a small cluster of circular tables." Or: "The meal had been pure nectar. Jess had chosen pancakes with a filling that had dissolved in his mouth, leaving an after-taste of bliss. He now decided just to shoot the breeze, and had ordered his favourite after-lunch coffee whilst he watched the passing of time in the square." Or: "Above this jazz of images, there seemed to float a patch of ever-changing pastels."

Although the book is subtitled "A collection of tales of tomorrow," the lead story, "Lottery" seems rooted in the past. However, that could be because I know Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" (1948), which Staig dresses up in slightly different clothes. There's a town named Arkham, an unpleasant main character named Jess (only the first of many one-syllable names in the book), and well-built tension in this tale of cannibalism. "All Together" sees wannabe rock stars jamming musically with forces that emerge from a teach-yourself CD. But the stand-out, probably, is "Liquid Friendship" – a cocky, post-cyberpunk parody (I hope) that introduces the reader to how generations of teenagers might eventually speak. Having rubbished the effects of "corkers, pacifiers, buzz-flies, magik moments, as well as samples of stuff they dish out at the Social Mediation Centres that give you 'rainbow' spots," the narrator announces his credo: "You see, I'm the kind of kid that needs the real banana." This rebel also tells us of his love interest, possibly with a wink of gratitude to John Sladek: "She calls herself Tick-Tock and apart from having a real cute name, she's a dream canoe." Well, quite.

The other book from Scholastic is K. M. Peyton's *Unquiet Spirits*, an altogether classier act: a well-written ghost story about a young woman who gets an ill-paid job working in a haunted house and falls in love with the owner's son. This book is aimed at an older reading audience, and quite possibly was written by an older writer, or somebody emulating more traditional horror tales. Although characters "fancy" each other, there is very little slang (and there are no neologisms either) in this book. Furthermore, the words "apace" and "codswallop" are used, which give the book a pleasant feeling of *hommage*.

The central notion of Charles de Lint's *Trader* (Macmillan, £16.99) has been visited before, but the

author succeeds with this novel because of its convincing characters and some interesting twists. Two men who do not know each other wake up one morning in each other's bodies, in different parts of town. While one soul (Max) embarks immediately on a plan to try to regain his old body, the second soul (Johnny) cannot believe his luck. Johnny has left behind a life of poverty, an angry girlfriend, landlord, and a lack of job prospects, and has moved into a nicer apartment and a reasonable business as a luthier.

It is the women in these men's lives (not necessarily romantically linked) who are quickly aware of the changes. The lonely teenaged girl from Max's apartment block (a friend of Max's who likes to watch him work on his guitars) accepts, with the open-mindedness of youth, that Max has been taken over by aliens. (She also believes the same has happened to her mother, whom she sees in a passionate embrace with another woman: her mother's lesbianism has been

kept a secret up to now.) The plot thickens when a friend of Johnny's ex-girlfriend (keep up) becomes attracted to the spirit of Max, now residing in Johnny's body. This woman, however, takes over three-quarters of the book to believe what has happened.

When the men in question physically touch each other, a body-soul continuum is upset, and they are dragged into a well-realized spirit-world. At first it resembles the farmland of Max's old mentor, but there is a lot more to this dimension than that. And a very interesting question is posed therein: What would happen if one or other of the mixed-up body-soul jumbles was killed? *Trader* is a most intriguing novel that examines the very nature of human identity, and is well worth a read. Besides, any book that name-checks "There's a Guy Works Down the Chip Shop Swears He's Elvis" by Kirsty MacColl is okay with me.

David Mathew

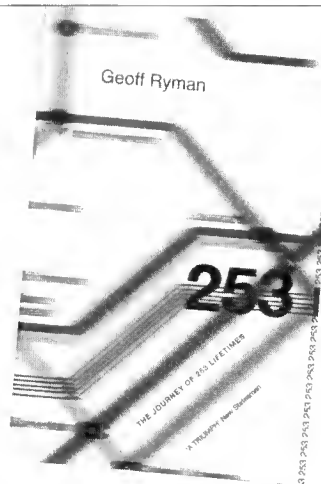
Who?

Paul Brazier

There are probably readers who are expecting this to be a review of Dr Who books. Others, more perceptive, will have looked at the book cover and concluded, that this will be a review of Geoff Ryman's new novel *253 The Print Remix* (Flamingo, £6.99). Others still might think that these expectations of the audience are overblown. Well, congratulations, you are all right. (Sf historians who expect mention of Algis Budry, and those who have no idea are excluded from these congratulations.)

The first group will know I have some small subtlety of mind, and am leading you to something not entirely unconnected with Dr Who. The second group will already know that Geoff Ryman's latest work of genius is worth buying, and the last group won't expect me to talk down to newcomers; knowing reviews such as this are part and parcel of the joy of encountering a new and informed interest group. They will tolerate my expectations.

Briefly, *253* was not written for print; it was created as an exercise in interactive fiction for the internet, and is still available there (see the advert on page 33). That it has transferred so successfully to print is a mark of the writer's genius. It is also a monument to every minute any one of us who has ever commuted on a



crowded train has spent gazing at their fellow passengers and idly wondered who they were. Ryman tells us, or at least gives a fictional account of every passenger, all 253 of them, on a London tube train. I can't tell you any more than this; imagine a novel with 253 characters that hangs together, makes you laugh, makes you cry, and all within the constraints of 253 words per person. Like a sonnet, like a haiku, like a villanelle, the constraint of the form leads to some startlingly wonderful writing. If it were true to its subject, this review would be 253 words; but the word 'fictional' above is the 253rd word. I gave six copies of this book to friends to read on the tube, asking only that they would not restrain their guffaws. They report no problems complying. I hope this goes some way to achieving recognition of Ryman's achievement. As for the 'Who' connection, I suggest you get hold of a copy of the book and look up passenger 121 (Ryman himself appears in the book, although much as Kurt Vonnegut does in his books – some fictional licence is taken with his own character).

Anyone who knows will tell you that you can tell a Dr Who fan by the fact that they have a favourite Doctor. Well, my favourite Doctor was Tom Baker, but I am not a Dr Who fan. This may be to do with the fact that during the heyday of Dr Who there was comparatively little fantastic fiction on TV and that it was watch that or nothing. I came to Doctor Who late – I was 13 when the first episode was broadcast, so never had the visceral behind-the-sofa childhood experience that so many younger people describe. But, in my 20s, I did enjoy the sharp wit of Douglas Adams' scripts as performed by Tom Baker. So it was interesting seeing them from the other side while reading Tom Baker's autobiography, *Who on Earth is Tom Baker?* (Harper-Collins, £17.99).

It is easy to believe this book is fiction, to begin with. Baker takes you up to certain points in his life, then leaves you there, panting for more, and picks up another thread. However, the realization that it is not fiction comes when the reader discovers that Baker never resolves the tensions he creates, perhaps because he has never resolved them in real life; he has told you all he is going to of his traumas and deeply personal pain. The inside view of The Doctor as portrayed by Tom Baker is actually deeply irrelevant to the story of a man who suffered tremendously for much of his life and only manages to cope with that pain by turning the episodes into hilarious and often scurrilous anecdotes. The loss of his children by divorce is deeply unsettling and the pain barely hinted at; the years wasted drinking in the company of the likes of Jeffrey Bernard are likewise sketched in and then ignored; but the final portrait of the book is telling. Baker mows the grass in his local cemetery, and his plot is already booked; indeed the gravestone is already carved, and leans against the church porch, awaiting only a final date. A Dr Who fan turns up "to pay his respects" when Jon Pertwee dies. As with the rest of the book, this is buried among a whole mountain of other trivia, including worrying about being murdered by the IRA. It is both funny and very scary. I liked Tom Baker a lot before I read this book; I like him a lot more now. But, given the 'fan' depicted here, more than ever before I must emphatically deny that I am in any way a Dr Who fan.

Now that the BBC have taken over the franchise and started publishing the Dr Who books themselves, and Virgin have turned what were the new

adventures of Doctor Who into the New Adventures of Bernice Summerfield ('Benny'), the new companion and now ex-companion of Dr Who invented by Paul Cornell, it behoves me to comment on the two series as a whole, and certain novels in particular.

First, an ominous word on style. The New Adventures have reasonable paintings on the covers, white eminently readable spines, and nice plain typesetting inside. The new series of BBC Dr Who books have evidently been Designed. They have full colour full bleed abstract covers and awful tiny unpleasant type inside. Furthermore, the BBC editors seem to have gone for an extremely traditional view of Dr Who, so that while the books look modern, they read as very old fashioned, while the Virgin books look a bit tame, but read as bang up to date.

Unable to accept the more than fifty books that Virgin have published as part of the canon, the BBC attempt to pick up where they left off with one of the most witless pieces of junk I have ever read, *The Eight Doctors* (BBC, £4.99) by Terrance Dicks. In this book, the eighth doctor loses his memory and has to go back through time visiting each of his previous selves to find out who he is.

Dicks makes a brave attempt, but the project was doomed from the start; if it is not possible to handle this many characters convincingly in such a short book (unless your name is Geoff Ryman).

This is not to say that Dicks is a bad writer. *Mean Streets* (Virgin, £4.99) is as fine a piece of post-modernist new adventuring as you could care to imagine. My overall impression is that Virgin are at the forefront (but not the cutting edge of cliché) of the current generation's attempt to reinvent fiction in its own image. In this book, Dicks tells the story of how Benny and another erstwhile companion, Chris Cwej, go back to a planet which Cwej and Roz Forrester (yet another companion, honourably dead) had promised to revisit to solve a crime they didn't have time for last time. From the title, you can see that this is a noirish private eye story, but Dicks manages the addition of nineties sensibilities so effortlessly you would think they belonged. This is one of the well-worth reading volumes here.

Back at the BBC, we find that some of the New Adventurers have crossed over successfully to the new camp. John Peel's *War of the Daleks* (BBC, £4.99) is a really rather engaging tale of a civil war among the Daleks

fomented by the Doctor. With little in the way of characterization to recommend it, it is a rip-roaring space opera that passes the time pleasantly enough. Mark Morris's *The Bodysnatchers* (BBC, £4.99) was reviewed here last month, but is worth mentioning again as being head and shoulders above many of the other BBC books, although Jonathan Blum and Kate Orman's *Vampire Science* (BBC, £4.99) is an honourable attempt to make some scientific sense of one of the oldest horror stories around.

Continuing Virgin's post-modern attempt to redefine all popular genre fiction as Virgin fiction, Matthew Jones' *Beyond the Sun* (Virgin, £4.99) is a lame attempt to retell Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* while dispossessing Le Guin of her morality. As the biggest thing I can remember about reading this book is its rudeness to Le Guin, I guess it is not recommended.

Dave Stone's *Ship of Fools* (Virgin, £4.99) likewise attempts to annex another branch of popular fiction to Virgin. In this case, Benny goes off on a luxury cruise on a spaceship where incredibly rich people get murdered in increasingly bizarre manners while thinly disguised supersleuths not entirely dissimilar to Hercule Poirot try to prevent any more murders happening. I was sufficiently uninterested in this book that when I left it on a train I couldn't be bothered to find another copy to finish it.

Lawrence Miles fares better in *Down* (£4.99), his retelling of subterranean sf in the manner of Iain Banks. The plot of this story is so labyrinthine and ludicrous it is fun, and the outrageous plot twists ensure we know that the writer had his tongue planted firmly in his cheek as he wrote. He is also the author of a previous New Adventure, *Christmas on a Rational Planet*, and that one really was all out weird – the only thing it really wasn't was rational.

Most recently, Kate Orman's *Walking to Babylon* (£4.99) proves that her sublime *Return of the Living Dad* (recounting Benny's problems with her father, their reconciliation, and how a lot of aliens have been rescued from crop circles in Wiltshire) was not a flash in the pan. Along with a rather charmingly ordinary story about criminals setting up a time path back to Babylon in order to provoke a time war that Benny has to avert, is a staggeringly clear overview of what exactly might happen if people with the technology to build a Dyson sphere and travel in time actually were provoked to go to war. Terrifying and touching. Kate Orman is getting to be as good a Paul Cornell, who is rumoured to be writing wonderful stuff for independent publication real soon. Can't wait.

Paul Brazier



The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Bakis, Kirsten. **Lives of the Monster Dogs**. Sceptre, ISBN 0-340-68597-2, 291pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1997; set in the early 21st century, it concerns intelligent, talking dogs who are the products of a secret scientific experiment; enormous praise has been bestowed on this book by all the usual mainstream sources [*New York Times*, *Washington Post*, etc], although not, to our knowledge, by the sf press which scarcely seems to be aware of it; it's a debut novel by a new, young, Swiss-born American writer.) *Late entry: 1997 publication not actually received for review, but purchased by us in January 1998.*

Barnes, John. **Earth Made of Glass**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85815-5, 416pp, hardcover, cover by John Harris, \$25.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; sequel to *A Million Open Doors*.) *April 1998.*

Benford, Gregory. **Cosm**. Avon/Eos, ISBN 0-380-97435-5, 344pp, hardcover, cover by Raquel Jaramillo, \$23. (Sf novel, first edition; a hard-sf thriller, it's being touted as Benford's most ambitious fictionalization of the methodology of science since *Timescape* [1980]; we listed the British [Orbit] edition last issue, although that's not out until April.) *7th January 1998.*

Bunch, Chris. **The Darkness of God: Book Three of The Shadow Warrior**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-38737-6, 246pp, A-format paperback, cover by Nicholas Jainschigg, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; pure old-fashioned space opera, by the looks of it; the opening sentence is: "A Federation battlefleet whispered through subspace"; and the concluding sentence is: "The Grayle, at full drive, plunged into the heart of the dying sun"; does one need more?) *Late entry: 1st December 1997 publication, received in January 1998.*

Carroll, Jonathan. **Kissing the Beehive**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06612-1, 251pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; it sounds a bit like *Twin Peaks*.) *21st May 1998.*

Champion, Sarah, ed. **Disco 2000**. "Nineteen new stories from the last hours of 1999." Sceptre, ISBN 0-340-70771-2, xv+364pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Quasi-sf anthology on near-future disco-music and clubbing themes, first edition; it contains all-original stories by Steve Aylett, Poppy Z. Brite, Pat Cadigan, Douglas Coupland, Paul Di Filippo, Neal Stephenson and Robert Anton Wilson [getting a bit old for this kind of thing, one would have thought], together with fiction by such more-or-less trendy journalists and comics folk as Steve Beard, Helen Mead, Grant Morrison, Douglas Rushkoff and the editor, Sarah Champion, who is described as "a former *NME* hack" and "editor of the best-selling *Disco Biscuits*"; in her introduction, she says that when asked how he intends to celebrate the Millennium "J. G. Ballard replied (on the back of a photograph of a motorway flyover) that he plans to 'run for the hills, or at least in the opposite direction' since it 'threatens to be hijacked by Tony Blair, Melvyn Bragg and co'"; there is an accompanying "soundtrack CD," priced at £12.99, which we have not been sent.) *19th February 1998.*

Clee, Mona. **Overshoot**. Ace, ISBN 0-441-00509-8, 388pp, A-format paperback, cover by Diane Fenster, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; a New Age-ey disaster story, about the 21st-century consequences of global warming, this appears to be a second novel by a new American [?] writer; her first, which we didn't see, was called *Branch Point*.) *1st February 1998.*

Cool, Tom. **Secret Realm**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86417-5, 304pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; we haven't heard of this author before, but this is his second novel [the first was a Baen paperback original called *Infectress*, 1997]; it's about virtual-reality warfare, and the publishers compare it to the work of Roger Zelazny.) *May 1998.*

Daley, Brian. **Smoke on the Water: Book One of Gam-**

maLAW. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-35858-9, 256pp, A-format paperback, cover by Michael Evans, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; it's militaristic space opera, and first of a tetralogy; the author died in 1996, but Del Rey Books inform us that he had been working on this series [among many other projects] for an astonishing 12 years prior to his death.) *1st January 1998.*

Dali, Lorenzo. **Spiderous**. Ashleigh Barrow Books [6 Cypress St., Darwen, Lancs. BB3 2JX], ISBN 0-9522173-1-7, 115pp, small-press paperback, £4.95 [post free]. (Horror novel, first edition; we're told nothing about the author, but this is probably a debut novel.) *No date shown: received in January 1998.*

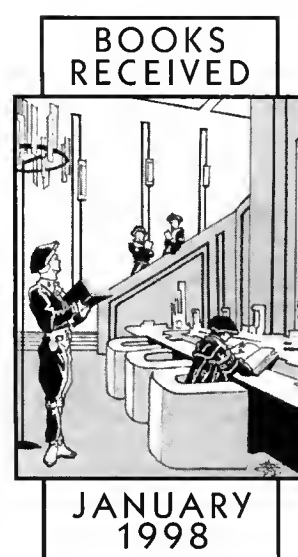
Dorsey, Candace Jane. **Black Wine**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86578-3, 285pp, trade paperback, \$13.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997; it's possibly sf disguised as fantasy, Gene Wolfe-style; winner of the [Canadian] IAFA/Crawford Award, it's commended by Ursula Le Guin, Elisabeth Vonarburg and others.) *February 1998.*

Foster, Alan Dean. **The Howling Stones: A Novel of the Humanx Commonwealth**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40645-1, 326pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Eggleton, \$6.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1997; latest in the series of adventures which began with Foster's first published novel, *The Tar-Aym Krang*, in 1972.) *1st January 1998.*

Foster, Alan Dean. **The Howling Stones: A Novel of the Commonwealth**. Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-532-0, 330pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Eggleton, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1997; note the word "Humanx" has been dropped from the British subtitle.) *5th February 1998.*

Gemmell, David. **Bloodstone: A Jon Shannow Adventure**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40797-0, 322pp, A-format paperback, cover by Royo, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1994.) *Late entry: 1st December 1997 publication, received in January 1998.*

Ghosh, Amitav. **The Calcutta Chromosome: A Novel of Fevers, Delirium and Discovery**. Picador, ISBN 0-330-



35331-4, 308pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in India, 1996; at last we get to see this book which won the 1997 Arthur C. Clarke Award [although there's no mention of that on this paperback edition] and whose publishers seem to have been determined to keep it out of the hands of grubby sci-fi persons; it looks to be a very interesting work, deserving of all the mainstream praise that has been heaped upon it; Ghosh was born in Calcutta in 1956, and is the author of three previous novels; he has also written for such journals as *Granta* and *The New Yorker* [which probably explains a lot – *New Yorker* writers, despite the fact that they include Ursula Le Guin, do not write science fiction, do they?]; he is married to an American, and now lives in the USA.) *Late entry: 1997 publication not actually received for review, but purchased in January 1998.*

Goldstein, Lisa. **Walking the Labyrinth**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85968-6, 254pp, trade paperback, \$12.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; reviewed by Gwyneth Jones *Interzone* 112.) *February 1998.*

Gould, Steven. **Helm**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86460-4, 383pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; Gould's third solo novel, it appears to be an ambitious adventure story in a planetary-romance setting.) *March 1998.*

Grimwood, Jon Courtenay. **Lucifer's Dragon**. "The cybershock sensation." New English Library, ISBN 0-340-67473-3, 377pp, B-format



paperback, cover by Gary Marsh, £6.99. (Sf novel, first edition; Grimwood's second novel, following *neAd-dix* [1997], to which it may be a sort of sequel – although this is not made clear.) 28th January 1998.

Hartwell, David G., ed. **The Science Fiction Century.** Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-861-1, 1005pp, C-format paperback, cover by John Harris, £14.99. (Sf anthology, first published in the USA, 1997; this is an American [Quality Paperback Book Club] edition with a British ISBN-and-price sticker; Hartwell's third massive anthology which attempts to memorialize the sf genre [the first two were *The World Treasury of Science Fiction* (1989) and *The Ascent of Wonder: The Evolution of Hard Science Fiction* (1994), although he has also done many other anthologies, mainly horror and fantasy], it's an interesting selection which contains a good deal of familiar stuff along with much judiciously-chosen material, often of novella length, which has been under-anthologized hitherto [e.g. H. G. Wells's "A Story of the Days to Come" – originally a five-parter in *The Pall Mall Magazine*, June-October 1899 – which has never actually appeared in an sf anthology before now]; besides Wells, non-generic authors include Dino Buzzati, E. M. Forster, Rudyard Kipling, Alexander Kuprin, C. S. Lewis, Jack London and J.-H. Rosny; the genre names, from Poul Anderson and James Blish to John Wyndham and Roger Zelazny, are too numerous and too obvious to list here; there's one overlap with *The Ascent of Wonder*, the William Gibson story "Johnny Mnemonic" [why?], and the arrangement, as usual with Hartwell's anthologies, is non-chronological – although one would have thought a book representing the century would have been better laid out in year order; recommended.) 29th January 1998.

Hegland, Jean. **Into the Forest.** Arrow, ISBN 0-09-925672-X, 239pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; reviewed by David Pringle in this issue of *Interzone*.) 5th February 1998.

Hobb, Robin. **Assassin's Quest: The Farseer III.** Voy-

ager, ISBN 0-00-648011-X, 838pp, A-format paperback, cover by John Howe, £7.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997; "Robin Hobb" is a pseudonym for Megan Lindholm.) 2nd March 1998.

Hutson, Shaun. **Knife Edge.** Warner, ISBN 0-7515-0126-3, xi+365pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mark Taylor, £5.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in 1997; it's one of Hutson's "Sean Doyle" IRA thrillers, of which he has already done several.) 5th February 1998.

Hutson, Shaun. **Purity.** Little, Brown, ISBN 0-316-90407-4, 345pp, hardcover, cover by Mark Taylor, £15.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first edition; another serial-killer yarn.) 5th February 1998.

Jacques, Brian. **Pearls of Lutra.** "A Novel of Redwall." Ace, ISBN 0-441-00508-X, 351pp, A-format paperback, cover by Troy Howell, \$5.99. (Animal fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1996; these Brian Jacques "Redwall" novels are published as kids' books in the author's native Britain, but seem to be adult bestsellers in the USA.) 1st February 1998.

Jones, Gwyneth. **Phoenix Café.** Vista, ISBN 0-575-60075-6, 298pp, A-format paperback, cover by David Farnen, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1997; a follow-up to the author's highly-praised *White Queen* and *Narth Wind*; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 118.) 29th January 1998.

Joyce, Graham. **Requiem.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86452-3, 286pp, trade paperback, cover by Girolamo Savoldo, \$13.95. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1995; reviewed by Paul Brazier in *Interzone* 111.) 20th February 1998.

Lynn, Elizabeth A. **Dragon's Winter.** Macmillan, ISBN 0-333-72372-4, 358pp, hardcover, cover by Jon Sullivan, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1998; this is World Fantasy Award-winning Lynn's comeback novel after a long time away from the field [about 15 years]; she has missed out on the boom in what *Lacus* now refers to as "BCFs" [Big Commercial Fantasies], and this would seem to be her attempt

at a piece of the action – although it's not exactly a Melanie Rawn-sized doorstop.) 20th March 1998.

McDevitt, Jack. **Eternity Road.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648308-9, 338pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1997; this looks like another quite pleasing archaeological sf mystery in its author's customary somewhat old-fashioned style.) 2nd February 1998.

Mackay, Scott. **Outpost.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86467-1, 349pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; it involves time travel and aliens; the author is Canadian, and has written at least one previous novel, a World War II thriller entitled *A Friend in Barcelona* [1991].) March 1998.

McKinley, Robin. **The Hero and the Crown.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00499-7, 227pp, trade paperback, cover by Kinuko Craft, \$12. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1985; winner of the Newbery Medal; 20th Ace printing; it seems to have become established as a modern classic.) 1st February 1998.

McLaughlin, Mark. **Feeding the Glamour Hogs.** "No Frills Chapbook #2." The Ministry of Whimsy Press [PO Box 4248, Tallahassee, FL 32315, USA], ISBN 1-890464-01-5, 50pp, stapled booklet, \$4.75 [post free]. (Horror collection, first edition; eight stories, mostly reprinted from small-press magazines.) Late entry: 1st December 1997 publication, received in January 1998.

McMahan, Jeffrey N. **Somewhere in the Night: Eight Gay Tales of the Supernatural.** Introduction by Jewelle Gomez. Alyson Books, ISBN 1-55583-432-9, 182pp, trade paperback, cover by Bruce Zinda, £6.99. (Horror collection, first published in the USA, 1989; it's described as a Lambda Literary Award Winner; this is the American second edition of October 1997 with a British price added; it's distributed in the UK by Turnaround, Unit 3, Olympia Trading Estate, Coburg Rd., London N22 6TZ.) 5th February 1998.

Modesitt, L. E., Jr. **The Soprano Sorceress.** "Book One of The Spellson Cycle." Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-534-7, 658pp, A-format paperback,

cover by Mel Grant, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997.) 5th February 1998.

Moon, Elizabeth. **Divided Allegiance: The Deeds of Paksenarrion, Book II.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-602-5, 522pp, A-format paperback, cover by Kevin Davies, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; this seems to be the second Orbit printing.) 5th February 1998.

Moscoe, Mike. **Lost Days: Book Three of the Lost Millennium.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00510-1, 316pp, A-format paperback, cover by Joseph Danisi, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; we saw the first in this time-travel adventure trilogy, *First Dawn*, back in December 1996; now here is "Book Three," which means we must have missed a second volume sometime in the past year...) 1st February 1998.

Nielsen, Nick. **ELV.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-649888-4, 281pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Humorous sf novel, first edition; apparently a debut by a new British writer [unless it's a pseudonymous hoax], it concerns time travel: "ELV" is an acronym for Evolution Limitation Volunteers.) 16th February 1998.

Pournelle, Jerry. **Starswarm: A Jupiter Novel.** "His first solo work in 20 years." Tor, ISBN 0-312-86183-4, 349pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Young-adult sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; fifth in a series of Heinlein-esque hard-sf "juveniles"; most of the others have been written by Charles Sheffield solus, although the first was by Pournelle-and-Sheffield.) May 1998.

Pringle, David, ed. **St James Guide to Horror, Ghost & Gothic Writers.** Preface by Dennis Etchison. Contributing editors Mike Ashley and Brian Stableford. St James Press [Gale Research, Inc., 835 Penobscot Building, Detroit, MI 48226-4094, USA], ISBN 1-55862-206-3, xvi+746pp, hardcover, \$105. (Alphabetically arranged bibliographical and critical guide to some 440 horror and weird-fiction authors; first edition; a companion volume to *St James Guide to Fantasy Writers* [1996], it contains essays by contributors who include – in addition to the prolific Ashley and Stableford – Jack Adrian, Ramsey Campbell,

Peter Crowther, Don D'Amassa, Stefan Dziemianowicz, Chris Gilmore, Paul Di Filippo, John Grant, S. T. Joshi, Joel Lane, David Langford, Sean McMullen, Chris & Pauline Morgan, Nicholas Royle, Andy Sawyer, Darrell Schweitzer, Lisa Tuttle, Jeff VanderMeer and Gary Westfahl.) *January 1998.*

Robertson, R. Garcia y. **The Moon Maid and Other Fantastic Adventures.** Golden Gryphon Press [364 West Country Lane, Collinsville, IL 62234, USA], ISBN 0-9655901-8-6, xi+275pp, hardcover, cover by Ron Walotsky, \$22.95. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; it contains eight stories, all reprinted from *Asimov's* or *F&SF*; this is the second book to be published by James Turner's new Golden Gryphon Press, a sort of breakaway from Arkham House; R. Garcia y Robertson [born in California, 1949] seems to have a lot of books out from different publishers lately, including *Atlantis Found* [AvoNova, April 1997] and *American Woman* [Tor, February 1998].) *23rd March 1998.*

Scarborough, Elizabeth Ann. **The Godmother's Web.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-00503-9, ix+308pp, hardcover, cover by Tara McGovern-Benson, \$19.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; latest in the series

which began with *The Godmother* and *The Godmother's Apprentice*.) *1st February 1998.*

Silverberg, Robert. **The Alien Years.** Voyager, ISBN 0-246-13722-3, 453pp, hardcover, cover by Fred Gambino, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition [?]; a big one about an alien invasion of the Earth, it's dedicated: "For H. G. Wells, the father of us all.") *16th February 1998.*

Silverberg, Robert. **Edge of Light: A Time of Changes, Downward to the Earth, The Second Trip, Dying Inside, Nightwings.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648038-1, 980pp, B-format paperback, £9.99. (Sf omnibus, first edition; the five novels repackaged here were all first published in the USA, 1969-1972 - which is generally reckoned to be Silverberg's best period; a bumper bargain volume for those who haven't encountered the books before.) *16th February 1998.*

Smith, Sinclair. **Double Date.** Point Horror, ISBN 0-590-19751-7, 170pp, A-format paperback, £3.50. (Juvenile horror novel, first published in the USA, 1996; it's "copyright Dona Smith.") *February (?) 1998.*

Stine, R. L. **Goosebumps Collection 8: My Hairiest Adventure, A Night in Terror Tower, The Cuckoo Clock of Doom.**

Scholastic/Hippo, ISBN 0-590-19750-9, 380pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Juvenile horror omnibus, first edition; the three constituent novels were originally published separately in the USA, 1994 and 1995; all are copyright "Parachute Press, Inc.") *February (?) 1998.*

Sturgeon, Theodore. **Thunder and Roses: The Complete Stories of Theodore Sturgeon, Volume IV.** Edited by Paul Williams. Foreword by James Gunn. North Atlantic Books [PO Box 12327, Berkeley, CA 94712, USA], ISBN 1-55643-252-6, xv+380pp, hardcover, cover by Paula Morrison, \$25. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; more than a decade after Sturgeon's death, Williams has gathered together all of his stories, arranged them in chronological order with notes, and is now publishing them in a series which may stretch to ten volumes; this fourth volume contains stories written between early 1946 and the end of 1947, one of Sturgeon's prolific periods; among the better-known pieces are the title story, "Maturity," "It Wasn't Syzygy" and "The Professor's Teddy Bear"; there are also two never-previously-collected stories, "The Blue Letter" and "Wham Bop!"; the previous volume in the series, *Killdozer!*, was reviewed by Brian Stableford in *Interzone* 121.) *Late entry: December (?)*

1997 publication, received in January 1998.

Sumner, Mark. **Insanity, Illinois.** "News from the Edge." Ace, ISBN 0-441-00511-X, 198pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jeff Walker, \$5.99. (Humorous sf novel, first edition; this, second in a series which began with *The Monster of Minnesota* [which we didn't see], appears to be a mickey-take on *The X-Files*; it's about a tabloid reporter who investigates the paranormal, and the publishers label it as sf.) *1st February 1998.*

Wolfe, Chris Anne. **Shadows of Aggar.** Pride Publications, ISBN 1-886383-30-8, 347pp, trade paperback, cover by Ginger Brown, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; something of a classic in its semi-underground subgenre, it's described as "the best Amazon adventure ever written"; the author died in 1997, having produced four novels and many stories [presumably all small-press]; Pride Publications evidently specializes in fiction of gay and lesbian interest, and their books are well produced; this is the American restored-text edition of November 1997 with a British price added; it's distributed in the UK by Turnaround, Unit 3, Olympia Trading Estate, Coburg Rd., London N22 6TZ.) *12th March 1998.*

Archer, Simon, and Stan Nicholls. **Gerry Anderson: The Authorised Biography.** Legend, ISBN 0-09-922442-9, 228pp, C-format paperback, £7.99. (Biography of the British TV sf-series producer, first published in 1996; co-author Archer died in a car crash in 1993, and Nicholls finished the work; this edition has "Legend" on the spine, but states "Orbit" on the title page, making this book the first fruit we have seen of Little Brown/Orbit's takeover of Random House's Legend imprint.) *15th January 1998.*

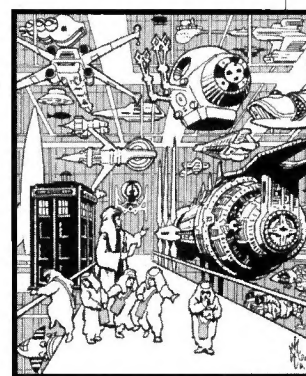
Chester, Deborah. **The Golden One.** "Lucasfilm's Alien Chronicles, 1." Ace, ISBN 0-441-00561-6, 344pp, A-format paperback, \$5.99. (Sf spinoff novel, first edition; this is not actually a movie spinoff in the normal sense, but is described in the accompanying publicity as being set in "the first new universe developed

Spinoffery

This is a list of all books received that fall into those sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror which may be termed novelizations, recursive fictions, spinoffs, sequels by other hands, shored worlds and shore-crops (including non-fiction about shored worlds, films and TV, etc.). The collective term "Spinoffery" is used for the sake of brevity.

by Lucasfilm since *Star Wars*"; the present novel is "the beginning of a nine-book, epic story cycle.") *1st February 1998.*

Clarke, Arthur C., and Gregory Benford. **Beyond the Fall of Night.** Ace, ISBN 0-441-05612-1, xii+339pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Eggleton, \$5.99. (Sf novella [by Clarke] and its sequel by another hand, first published in this form in the



USA, 1990; fifth Ace printing; the Clarke novella, "Against the Fall of Night," was originally published in the pulp magazine *Startling Stories* in November 1948.) *1st February 1998.*

Mortimore, Jim. **Eye of Heaven.** "Doctor Who." BBC Books, 0-563-40567-8, 277pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first edition; it opens on Easter

Island in the year 1842.) *2nd February 1998.*

Richards, Justin. **Option Lock.** "Doctor Who." BBC Books, 0-563-40583-X, 281pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first edition; it's set "from 13th-century England to the former Soviet Union, from the United States to the cold wastes of space.") *2nd February 1998.*

Smith, Bill. **Star Wars: The Essential Guide to Weapons and Technology.** Illustrated by David Nakabayashi and Troy Vigil. Bantam, ISBN 0-7522-2338-0, xvii+213pp, very large-format paperback, £14.99. (Illustrated guide to the imaginary weapons and other devices in the *Star Wars* sf-movie series created by George Lucas; first published in the USA, 1997; a follow-up to the same author's *Star Wars: The Essential Guide to Vehicles and Vessels* [1996].) *6th February 1998.*

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BARRINGTON BAYLEY: trade paperback editions of *Empire of Two Worlds*, *Annihilation Factor* (novels) and *Seed of Evil* (collection), £5 each (inland, inc. p&p), signed and personalized, from 48 Turreff Avenue, Telford, Shropshire TF2 8HE.

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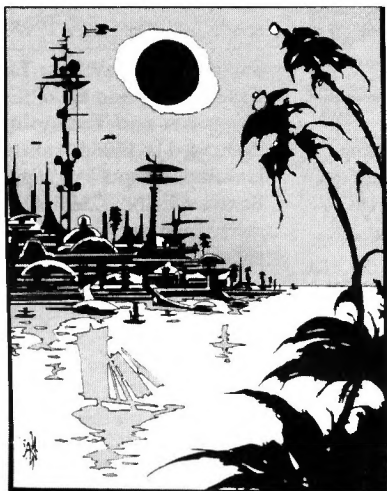
SF, HORROR, FANTASY paperback firsts/collectibles US & UK. Specialists in Howard, Burroughs, Dick, Brunner, Moorcock, Lovecraft, Doc Savage, Shadow, Pulp Heroes, but all pre-1980 authors represented. Send 50p SAE or \$2 cash for catalogues: Zardoz Books, 20 Whitecroft, Dilton Marsh, Westbury, Wiltshire BA13 4DJ.

HUGO AWARD-winning *Science Fiction Chronicle*, published since 1979, has all the news of US and UK publishing, plus reviews, interviews, forthcoming books, much, much more. Sample copy £3.50, subscription 12/£29 airmail from Algot Press, c/o R. Hansen, 144 Plashet Grove, E. Ham, London E6 1AB.

HARM'S WAY – "What if Charles Dickens had written a space opera?" (*Locus*) – large paperback, £3.50. *The Hour of the Thin Ox and Other Voices*, paperbacks, £1.50 each. Prices include postage. Colin Greenland, 98 Sturton St., Cambridge CB1 2QA

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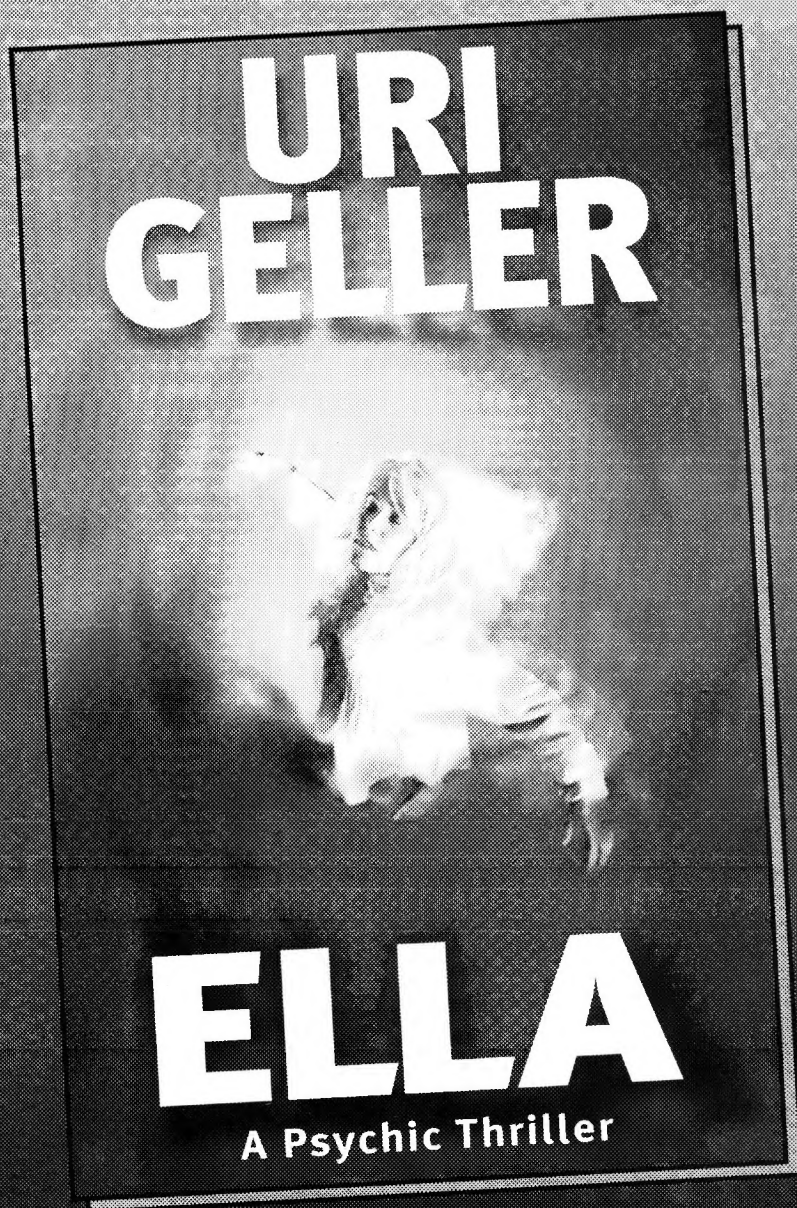


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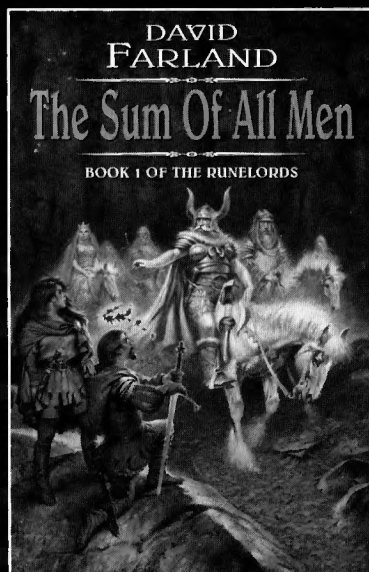
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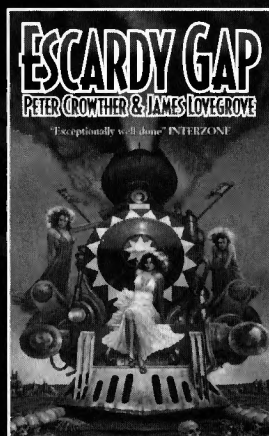


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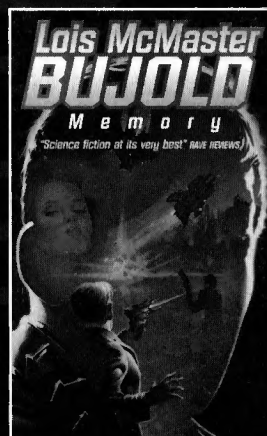
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